The Washington Monthly

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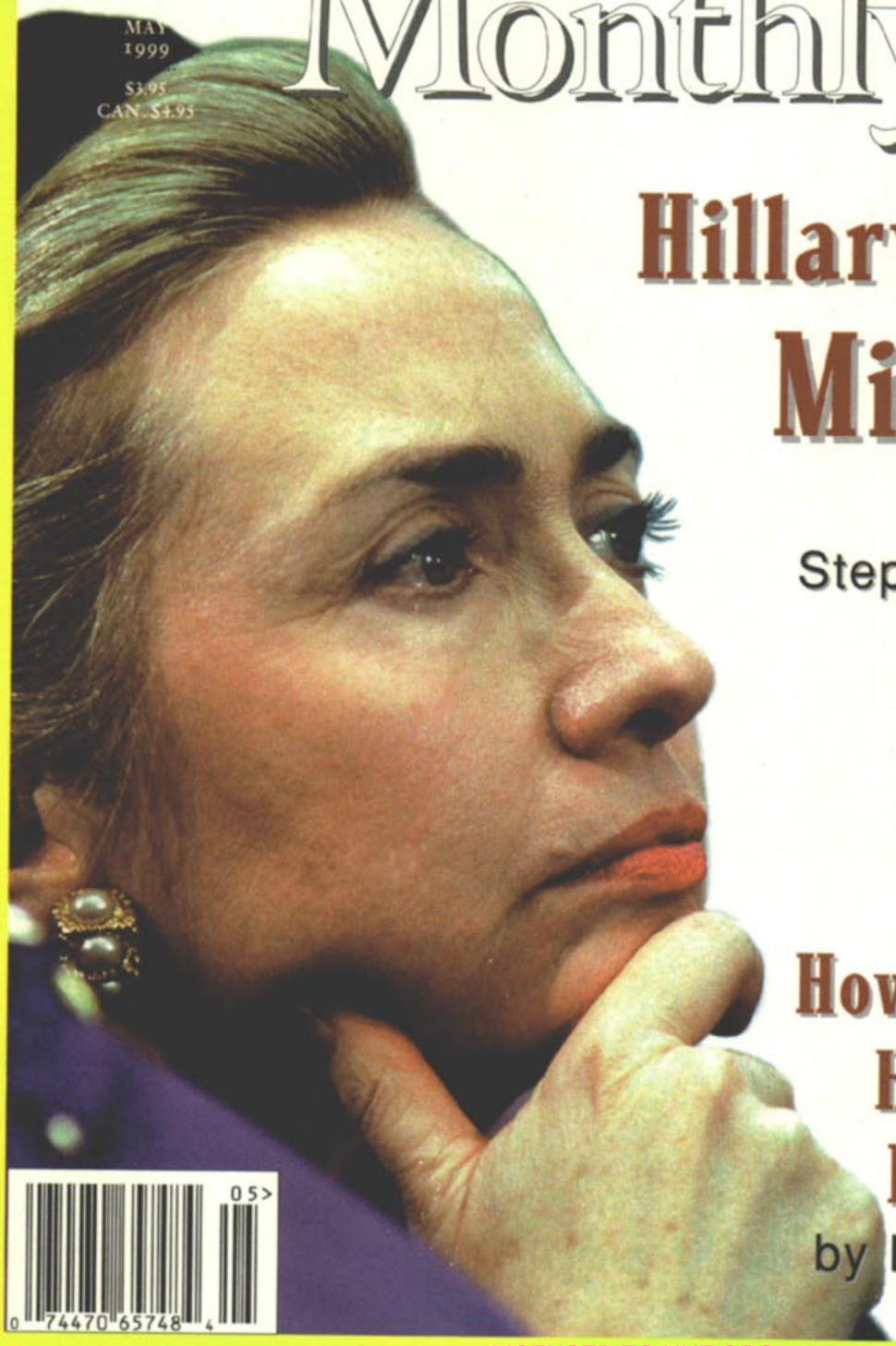
Ralph Peters on What's Wrong With the Military

What Public Schools Can Learn From Hollywood & George W. Bush



Hillary's Big Mistake

by George Stephanopoulos

&

How it Could Have Been Prevented

by Lanny Davis

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A Labor Message to Republicans in Congress

Working families hear politicians of both parties talk a lot about "family values". But voting records are more important than rhetoric. That's why our union supports more Democratic candidates than Republican.

I've often wondered how Republicans can extol "family values"while boasting how they defeated President Clinton's 1993 proposal for universal health coverage. I can tell you there is nothing families "value" more than affordable health care. There are 45 million Americans who have no health insurance, and most of them work everyday. The fear of an illness or injury to a family member keeps them awake nights.

Even people who have health coverage are often pushed around by HMO owners concerned more about profit than patient care. In the last session of Congress, the GOP killed labor-backed proposals for a Patients Bill of Rights.

It used to be dismissed as "class warfare" when labor unions labeled you the "party of the rich". But since right-wing conservatives took over the Congress with their anti-worker agenda, even Republican governors are making rueful jokes about it. At a recent GOP retreat, Connecticut Gov. John Rowland was quoted: "The good news is, business and the rich still love us. If they vote four or five times each in the next election, we'll be okay." New Jersey Gov. Christie Whitman echoes his comments that Republicans in Congress are seen as "uncaring" and "mean-spirited".

Not all Republicans are our enemies, just as not all Democrats are our friends. But let's face it: you have an "image" problem. Call off the attack dogs of the anti-worker right, put your votes where your rhetoric is on "family values", and you'll solve your problem while helping working families solve theirs.

Martin J. Maddaloni,
General President

United Association of Plumbers, Pipefitters and Sprinklerfitters.

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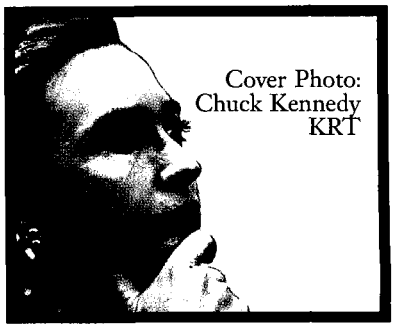

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Letters

Draft Us First

Regarding the draft ("Tilting at Windmills," March 1999) you got it half-right: We need the draft for social cohesion reasons. And we should offer both peace work and war work, because we need both. That should include all those perks that veterans are eligible for now. We don't need to send boys to war. And we don't need to pick on selected groups. I say draft both genders of all abilities and put them where they can do the job of their choosing. Don't worry, there are plenty of machos who will pick up the gun before they will pick up a pen. And I want to start the draft at age 48 to 53. This age will include me and many of our representatives and business leaders (to make it fair). They will be more choosy about which battles are worth it if they are in it.

WILLIAM DAWSON
Charleston, West VA

I generally respect Charles Peters' views very much but with this large exception: his endless and unconvincing insistence on a draft ("Tilting at Windmills," March 1999). This time, his proposal to only draft rich kids with 1400 SATs is downright frivolous. Nor is there any evidence that serving in the military makes draftees more tolerant and the military more democratic. As a drafted veteran myself, I can't remember too many examples of "democracy" in the military or among my comrades.

Can you imagine all the gasbags in Congress, in editorial offices and think tanks, in all of Washington's gilded law and lobbying suites allowing their children and grandchildren to be forced to undergo the rigors of basic training or made to spend two years in some bureaucratically-determined altruistic venture? (However, over-50 men and women, more experience, and certainly wealthier, would be far more suitable candidates for Peters' mandated idealism.)

Peters has also missed the primary reason why the military services are experiencing a shortfall in recruiting, though as of this writing the Navy has met its quota and the Army is not too far behind. The real problem is the inordinate number of people the Pentagon and the White House insists it must have to fulfill its overreaching doctrine of being able to fight two wars simultaneously. Saddled with this grandiose and outmoded scheme, it is no wonder that the services cannot always come up with enough young people willing to put their lives on the line. The only political rationale for the two-war strategy is to allow pro-military politicians to portray themselves as guardians of "national security" and then make sure that hundreds of millions of the military budget are siphoned off into their pet pork barrel projects.

MURRAY POLNER
Great Neck, NY

The editors reply: the authors of these letters will be interested in Ralph Peters' article on p.9

Family Values

"He has it all wrong," I might have said in the typical vein of a New York "Family" member about whom Nicholas Lemann wrote in his review of Norman Podhoretz's latest self-celebratory work ("The Outcast," January/February 1999). But of course Mr. Lemann didn't have it all wrong. Most of his review quite accurately described Podhoretz's unique combination of brilliance and coarseness. Lemann also understood the nature of the Family but his view sometimes went somewhat askew. While he alludes to the cast of characters, he seems vague as to their historical relationships; there were fathers, mentors, brothers, competitors and a cast of cousins both close and many times removed. The Founding Fathers, Sidney Hook and Lionel Trilling, identified themselves as Trotskyists, not ex-communists. Also, Podhoretz's ex-friends Lillian Hellman and Norman Mailer were not members of New York's Family, nor were they professional intellectuals. Both were established literary figures. By feuding with them, Podhoretz advanced himself into the limelight of their fame and fortune.

I was born into that New York Family, learned through osmosis the rules of dinner table combat and later married within the Family. I came to know the importance of political posture and the prerequisite for factionalism: focusing on your opponent's mistake, thereby undermining his entire position.

The core of the Family, an intelligentsia that was middle European in origin and fiercely anti-communist, was peopled by the editors and writers of four New York magazines, none of whose circulations numbered more than 25,000 paid subscribers: *The New Leader*, *Commentary*, *Partisan Review*, and *Dissent*. They were staffed and written for mostly by American Jews (with a sprinkling of others, e.g. Dwight McDonald, Mary McCarthy, Michael Harrington), East European political emigrés, and academics such as Hook, Trilling, and Hannah Arendt. They rarely lunched in the '40s and early '50s (few could afford it) but debated the issues at their magazine offices and at large Saturday night parties (I hosted a couple myself); only finger food was served to avoid disrupting the intensity of conversation.

When Podhoretz came along in the mid-'50s, he was at least 10 years junior to the established members of the Family. It was hoped by those who mentored him into the Family that he would continue the good fight. He became editor of *Commentary* but in the course of the decade, the old New York Family scene changed: Success was in the air. But the nature of success was different. Until the advent of Podhoretz, making it had been defined by the Family as the publication of a book or article whose ideas were worthy of debate. Letters were exchanged (in print of course), voices were raised and a nod of approval given by one of the Fathers. For Podhoretz, success became fame and fortune among the fashionable.

He no longer took the subway to take tea on Morningside Heights, exchanging insights with Lionel and Diana on Keats or kitsch. Instead, he chased after the Limousine set in a custom-made dinner jacket to sup at the inlaid tables on the upper East

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Side. In his race to the top, he cut off his roots to the old New York intellectual world where he had once posed as one of "them." With the ambitions, demeanor and values of a Sammy Glick, Podhoretz ushered in a new era.

Podhoretz made his first serious alliance with Jason Epstein, also brilliant and ambitious, who was editor of Doubleday-Anchor books (where I worked for him in the '50s) and then at Random House. Epstein, then a wannabe, would contract for a book from a little-read intellectual mandarin and Podhoretz would unveil the idea in an article in *Commentary*. It was a useful collaboration. Whichever writer the two doted on became *in*—even finding his name in *Vogue*'s "People are Talking About ..." column. Podhoretz enjoyed the fruits of his labors. When the Kennedys went looking for intellectual support in the New York branch of Camelot, they found Podhoretz ready, willing, and waiting for his place at their table. After a brief foray in the upper strata, as Lemann points out, Podhoretz published *Making It*, bringing about his ouster from Camelot. (More a matter of bad taste, I thought, than bad reviews.) But there was no longer a New York family to which he could return. Norman first became part of the "Let It All Hang Out" '60s, then an advocate of neoconservatism; each posture was fanned by passionate feuds with ex-friends.

I miss the Family. Not one of them would choose an ambition as banal as money or hanker to be invited to the right parties; it was always more fun for the Family members to spend Saturday night among their own.

JOYCE LASKY REED
Chevy Chase, MD

Don't Knock the Bomb

It is difficult to criticize an icon like John Kenneth Galbraith. But in his review of *The Epic Years* (March 1999), he states that strategic bombing, particularly against Germany during World War II, was "ineffective." Professor Galbraith's bias derives from his chairmanship of the postwar bombing survey in Europe which determined that strategic bombing did not "appreciably" reduce German arms production until late in the war.

Quite true, but also misleading. Total arms production matters little if there is no fuel to propel the tanks and fly the planes. The Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe were severely handicapped during the latter part of the war because of fuel shortages caused by strategic bombing of the refineries, an attack strategy that slowly strangled the effectiveness—including vital training—of German forces.

Indirectly, strategic bombing also greatly reduced the number of experienced combat pilots available to the Luftwaffe. The great air battles over Germany in 1943-44, while extremely costly to the USAF, were even more so to Germany. One major consequence was virtually no German air opposition to Allied landings in France in 1944 and thereafter only sporadic and largely ineffective Luftwaffe interference as our troops advanced through France and into Germany.

PHILIP A. TRUE
Fairfax, VA

Growth Pains

Kudos to Rowe and Silverstein ("The GDP Myth", March 1999) for their trenchant and timely trashing of the GDP myth! Theirs is without question the clearest deconstruction of a mass of confusing data that I have read in a long time, and your magazine has performed a noble service in carrying it.

But I have a nagging question—what, if anything, are the many reporters and other pundits who are among your readers likely to do after they have read and digested it? Can we expect them to declare for publication to a broader audience that the emperor has no clothes on? I rather doubt it. The late I.F. Stone might have followed up (or more probably would have been saying something like it all along), but I can't call to mind any now writing who would feel and act upon the same sense of responsibility to pick up on the questions raised and publish further comment in a newspaper or magazine, other than your own.

JOSEPH B. RUSSELL
New York, NY

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Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

Bewildered Paratroopers • Blind Truckdrivers • Rampant Nepotism • Paula's Nice Mortgage • "The Lost Honor of Kathryn Beck"

THE AIRLINES PAY $2.45 FOR the average food serving on a domestic flight. This, as you have surely guessed, represents a reduction from the $3.63 spent five years ago. Instead of being angry at the airlines, however, I feel sorry for them. They're obviously being robbed by their caterers. What I've been served on recent flights isn't worth anything near $2.45.

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ON THE WHOLE, WE LIKE AND admire Hillary Clinton and would support her for the Senate. But we agree with George Stephanopoulos that her great weakness as a public figure is her dislike of the press. If her decision to stonewall on Whitewater was the administration's worst mistake, the second worst, at least in terms of the media, was the decision to close the door between the White House press room and the press secretary's office. This decision, at the beginning of Clinton's first term, got relations between the press and the president off on the wrong foot. It too was made by Hillary Clinton. She explained, according to Stephanopoulos' new book, that the president wanted "to be free to walk around without reporters looking over [his] shoulder." By closing the door, she made sure they would look over his shoulder and do so with hostility and suspicion.

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WHEN I WENT TO PUBLIC school I can only recall a handful of kids who were dropped at the door in the morning, and picked up in the afternoon by their parents. Today, if you drive by a school around 3 p.m. you're likely to see a long line of cars and vans waiting to pick up Jennifer and Jason.

Why? It must be more trouble for parents in an era when both are often working. The *Milwaukee Journal*, which recently ran an article on the phenomenon, quotes one authority on child care, Marguerite Kelly, saying, "Part of the great adventure of going to school is getting there and back without having their parents hanging around." I'm sure there really are some children who need protection from danger coming home from school or who live too far from school to walk. But on the whole, as one who walked a mile or so to and from high school, I agree with Kelly—except on freezing cold mornings.

Experience with HMOs is changing physicians' opposition to a Canadian-style single-payer system.

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TOM BETHELL, DAVID Ignatius, and I worked together here at the *Monthly* during the mid-1970s and we have remained friends to this day. So you can imagine how distressed I was to find that they both believe that it was the Earl of Oxford who actually wrote plays attributed to William Shakespeare. How could two such splendid fellows fall into such grave error!

To persist in their folly, they have to ignore one man: John Heminges. He more than any other person was responsible for collecting Shakespeare's plays and publishing them in the First Folio in 1623. How would he have known, you may ask, that he was publishing Shakespeare and not the Earl of Oxford? Because, dear reader, he had been a member of the Chamberlain's company since it was formed. It was the company—later called the King's Men—for which Shakespeare wrote his plays and for which he worked as an actor. "Heminges saw each just as it was finished," writes Marchette Chute in *Shakespeare of London*. "He had discussed the scripts with Shakespeare, worked over the casting and the staging, and had acted them with him." Another member of the Chamberlain's company, Henry Condell, joined Heminges in publishing the First Folio. Ben Jonson, who wrote a preface for the First Folio, had also known Shakespeare as both actor and writer.

Bethell doubts that Shakespeare, without a university education, could have written "The Comedy of Errors," since he claims the Roman play from which its plot was taken wasn't translated from Latin until after Shakespeare's play was written. This ignores both Ben Jonson's statement that Shakespeare did have "small Latin" and the fact that Latin was the main subject at the Stratford grammar school. "Plautus and Terence became a regular part of the curricula and were often performed by schoolboys,"

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write Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball in *A Short View of Elizabethan Drama*. The specific play of Plautus' on which "The Comedy of Errors" was based was "The Twin Menaechmi." Its popularity was such that, according to George Duckworth's *The Complete Roman Drama*, at least three other 16th-century plays had been based on it before Shakespeare wrote "The Comedy of Errors." So even if Shakespeare hadn't actually read "The Twin Menaechmi," the chances that he would have heard of it or its plot about twins and mistaken identity, either from schoolmates or from friends in the theater, are very strong.

I would never accuse my friends of snobbery, but I fear that most of their fellow Oxfordians are motivated by the conviction that a common man could not possibly have risen to Shakespeare's literary heights.

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YOU CAN ENJOY SEEING an undraped Gwyneth Paltrow and still be a little taken aback to learn that 686 million adult videos were rented last year, according to *The New York Times*. Not R-rated movies but real hard-core X-rated pornography. That's three dirty movies for every person in the United States. You might take comfort from the fact that the 1998 figures were down slightly from 1997. But this is probably because of the increased access to pornography on the Internet.

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REMEMBER HOW PHYSICIANS were almost unanimous in their opposition to Canadian-style single-payer health system? Experience with HMOs is changing that attitude. In a recent survey of 2,162 medical students, residents, and faculty members reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 57 percent said they supported single-payer.

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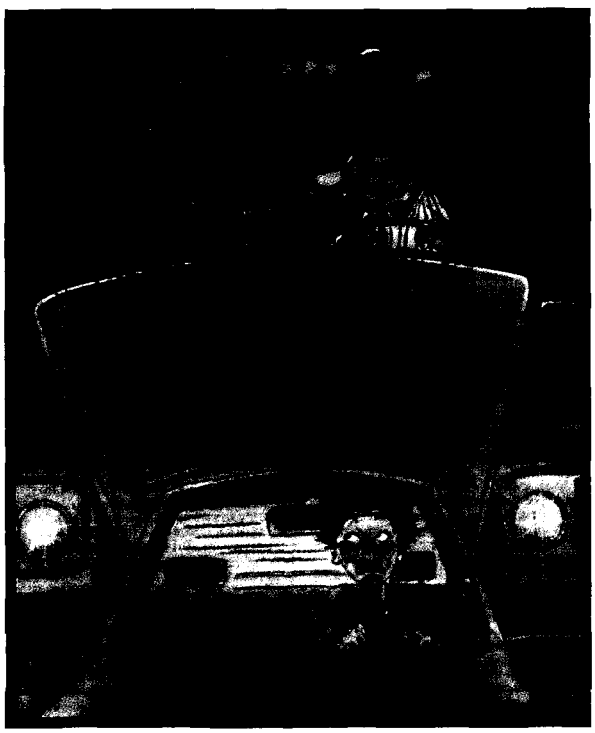
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN GUILTY OF an act of rudeness or inconsiderateness on the highway? I have. And I have often wanted to apologize immediately but I haven't known what to do. Although there are many widely recognized gestures of anger on the road, e.g. the shaken fist or the extended middle finger, I don't know any way to say "I'm sorry." I've tried bobbing my head down or waving a hand but the meaning simply isn't clear. Too bad. I'm convinced a lot of road rage could be nipped in the bud if the original offender only knew how to say, "The mistake was mine."



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I RISE TO AL GORE'S DEFENSE IN the matter of his supposedly luxurious boyhood at the Fairfax Hotel. The latest example is a column by Michael Kelly that refers to the hotel's "Louis XV furniture" and its "Embassy Row" location. It was and is on Embassy Row. And it is a luxury hotel today, but back in the '50s and '60s when the Gores lived there, there was no Louis XV furniture and nothing remotely luxurious above the first floor Jockey Club restaurant. I know because Al's sister Nancy was a friend and my wife and I visited the Gores' apartment. The Fairfax was, in fact, a moderately priced residential hotel. Among its tenants was a young journalist named Meg Greenfield who wasn't making enough money in her job at the *Reporter* magazine to afford anything fancy.

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WHAT IS HAPPENING to PBS? Two hours for a show called "The Courage to Be Rich"! Not to mention all the hours devoted to appraising antiques, based on the hope that that thing in Aunt Maude's attic may turn out to be worth a lot of money.

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IF YOU'RE TERRIFIED of those big trucks as I am, here's a little tip about how to avoid tangling with them on the highway: If you can't see the truck driver's mirrors, the driver can't see you. So if you're so close to his rear or to his sides that you can't see the mirrors, you're in danger. Also, when you're immediately in front of a big rig, the driver may not be able to see you. And remember, it takes a fully-loaded truck going 65 miles an hour about 350 feet to stop. And truck drivers don't like to hit the brakes because of the damage it does to the tires.

And just in case you aren't terrified, here are a few figures that may inspire a prudent regard for the hazard these trucks present. In 1997 alone, the crashes in which

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they were involved killed 5,355 people and injured 133,000.

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THOSE STATISTICS ARE FOR trucks weighing more than 10,000 pounds. A new passenger vehicle, Ford's Excursion, is going to be almost that big. It weighs 8,600 pounds and is nearly 19 feet long. It is the latest entry in the SUV market, which now accounts for more than half of new vehicle sales. You don't want to tangle with the things anymore than you do with trucks. "With a vehicle that size, it's going to crush any other vehicle it crashes with," says Clarence Ditlow, president of the Center for Auto Safety. As for the Excursion's contributions to air quality, the Sierra Club estimates that it will emit 130 tons of carbon dioxide over a 120,000-mile life.

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FROSTBURG, MARYLAND, IS LOSing 100 telemarketing jobs. Why? It seems that folks there are just too friendly. According to one official of Unite, the telemarketing firm that made the decision: "The culture and climate in Western Maryland is one of helping your neighbor and being empathetic and those sorts of things. The folks we encounter here ... do not prefer to be that type of assertive, aggressive sort of sales person."

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THE PENTAGON HAS APPROVED a $1.4 billion second phase of a contract to build 85,000 trucks for the Army. This despite the fact that, according to *Newsday*'s Patrick J. Sloyan, "The first 8,000 trucks have been plagued by safety and mechanical defects and skyrocketing costs. A series of truck rollovers, crashes and other accidents has resulted in Army-wide speed and load limitations on all the new trucks, which cost an average of $100,000 each." Also despite the fact that the trucks' manufacturer, Stewart and Stevenson, had pleaded guilty in 1997 to defrauding the Air Force and been fined $7 million. And, finally, despite the fact that Stewart and Stevenson had never made a truck before.

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DID YOU HEAR ABOUT PAULA Jones' mortgage? She bought a house in Cabot, Arkansas for $152,000 but only had to pay $2100 up front. The rest of the cost was covered by a mortgage of $149,900. That's 98.6 percent of the total. There seem to be two possibilities here. One is that her banker shares the president's taste in women; the other that lending practices are becoming reckless. It would be interesting to discover whether requiring such small down payments from the buyer has become widespread. To support that suspicion, there are the advertisements offering home equity loans at 125 percent of value which we cited a few months ago. The trouble with such practices is that when real estate values shrink the bank's loan is no longer secured by the value of the real estate. One of the big things that went way wrong during Japan's recent crisis was a similar drop in real estate values, which left the banks in trouble. Similar drops also caused financial institutions to fail during the Great Depression of the early '30s and during the savings and loan scandal of the '80s.

Ken Starr's hounding of Susan McDougal may turn out to be the sickest aspect of his Captain Ahab imitation.

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IF I WERE IN AL GORE'S SHOES, the single fact that I would find most dismaying is this: Although far more Hispanics are Democrats than are Republicans, George W. Bush leads Gore by 45 to 35 percent among Hispanic voters.

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IN OCTOBER MOST OF THE District of Columbia's drug abusers will become eligible for treatment. But the tragedy is that this was so long coming. Last year, for example, only 9 percent of the drug abusers got treated.

Similarly, the federal government has announced that it will start measuring coal dust levels in underground mines on October 1. (If you're wondering about the significance of October 1, that's when the new fiscal year begins.) Until now, management of the dust level has been left to the coal companies and if you're from West Virginia, as I am, you know this means a lot of lying, which is exactly what the *Louisville Courier-Journal* found when it looked into the situation.

Along the same "Why hasn't this been done before" lines is a report in *The Washington Post* that "Maryland is moving to become the first state in the nation to force poultry companies to assume responsibility for pollution caused by chicken manure." Shouldn't Maryland and every other state have been doing that already?

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ANTHONY RIZZO RECENTLY escaped with a hung jury from a charge of sexually assaulting a child. Would the verdict have been different if the judge had not prevented the jury from learning that 1) Rizzo had been fired for sexually harassing teachers at a school where he was the principal and 2) that he gets a state disability benefit of $38,000 a year based on his claim, according to *The Washington Post*, "that he has a permanent 'psychosexual disorder' that makes him unable to supervise women without trying to coerce them into having sex'"? All of this goes to show that conservatives aren't always wrong when they rant about lenient judges.

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SOME ARMY PARATROOPERS ARE said to be leery of jumping after reading the new instructions on what to do if their main and reserve parachutes fail to deploy.

"If there is no immediate reserve parachute reaction, the jumper will maintain his good tight body position and hold on the left carrying handle and immediately punch the MIRPS pack tray on the right side with a closed fist. If the MIRPS still does not respond, jumper will pull the right end panel loose from the MIRPS pack tray while keeping his hand away from the front of the reserve."

These instructions are supposed to be followed in the panicky seconds after the troopers realize that both their main chute and its back up have failed to open. Do you blame these guys for feeling queasy?

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"THE IRS CANNOT DO SOME OF the basic accounting and record-keeping tasks that it expects American taxpayers to do," the GAO's Gregory Kutz recently told the House Government Reform Committee. Some of the GAO's evidence concerned revenue losses—e.g., $17 million in fraudulent refunds—that seem trivial in comparison to $1.8 trillion in revenues the agency collected last year. But there is one failure that clearly merits attention: only $26 billion of the $222 billion in unpaid taxes are likely to be collected because the IRS does not have an effective method of targeting the non-payers most likely to cough up.

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KEN STARR'S HOUNDING OF Susan McDougal may be the sickest aspect of his Captain Ahab imitation. She served 18 months—remember those photographs of her in shackles?—for refusing to testify. Then he goes after her a second time for the same refusal. Sounds like double jeopardy, doesn't it? But Starr got away with it because of a technicality: The first charge was civil contempt, the second criminal contempt. The legal distinction between the two: The purpose of civil contempt is to coerce testimony—keep 'em in the slammer 'til they talk—while the purpose of criminal contempt is to punish them for not talking. But common sense says the coercive sentence also punishes. You're in jail. It's not fun. Most prosecutors understand this, so prosecution of the same person for both civil and criminal contempt is rare. It's usually only done, *The Washington Post*'s Edward Walsh observes, in cases involving drug trafficking, murder, or organized crime. But that didn't deter Captain Ahab. He followed one departure from customary practice, in which he brought perjury charges for a lie about sex, with another that was even more shocking. I would very much doubt that there is another case in which refusing to testify about a decade-old real estate transaction became the subject of both civil and criminal contempt. Thank goodness the majority of the jury in last month's criminal contempt trial disagreed with Starr. They voted to acquit Susan McDougal.

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SPEAKING OF OVERZEALOUS prosecutors, I just saw a movie on cable that I strongly recommend. It's called "The Lost Honor of Kathryn Beck." Starring Marlo Thomas and Kris Kristofferson, and made back in 1984 soon after the similar but less nightmarish "Absence of Malice," it describes a case in which rabid editors and reporters join with prosecutors hell bent on getting a conviction. Together, they drive a woman who isn't a criminal to commit a crime.

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HERE'S A POLL I HOPE CONGRESSIONAL Republicans will pay attention to: 60 percent of the adults surveyed said they would rather have education and health care improved than have their taxes cut. The poll was conducted not by any of those liberal pollsters whose results are always suspect in the eyes of the GOP, but by Market Strategies, which the conservative *Washington Times* describes as a "Republican-oriented polling firm."

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THE UPPER WEST SIDE ISN'T chic anymore, proclaims a recent article in *The New York Times*: "It's neither ritzy nor hip." Of course, it had become pretty hifalutin in the '80s. But when I lived on the Upper West Side in the late '40s, it was definitely not chic. What was wonderful about the era was that chic didn't make any difference. What counted was value. Consider Broadway in the years between 1946-49, which saw original productions of "The Iceman Cometh", "A Streetcar Named Desire", and "Death of a Salesman" among serious plays and "Annie Get Your Gun", "South Pacific", and "Kiss Me Kate" among the musicals. Not only was the quality high—perhaps the highest in the history of American theatre—but the cost was low. A seat in the last row of the highest balcony, where I could be found, cost $1.80. You could get a good Italian meal at Barbetta's or a good French one at Le Champlain or Le Fleur de Lis for $2.00.

It may be that today's West Side is not chic because the West Siders don't want it to be. "As unfashionable as it may be," says the *Times* article, "they prefer value to vogue." Another good sign: the current revivals of "Iceman" and "Salesman."

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READ OVER THE TABLE OF CONTENTS in this issue and you'll find among the authors' names Charles Peters, Ralph Peters, and Christian Peters. I know this must look like rampant nepotism, but it's not quite that bad. Ralph Peters is not a relative, but as his views on military service by the elite suggest, he is a soulmate. Christian Peters *is* a relative. He's my son and also, as his choice of public school teaching as a career indicates, a soulmate.

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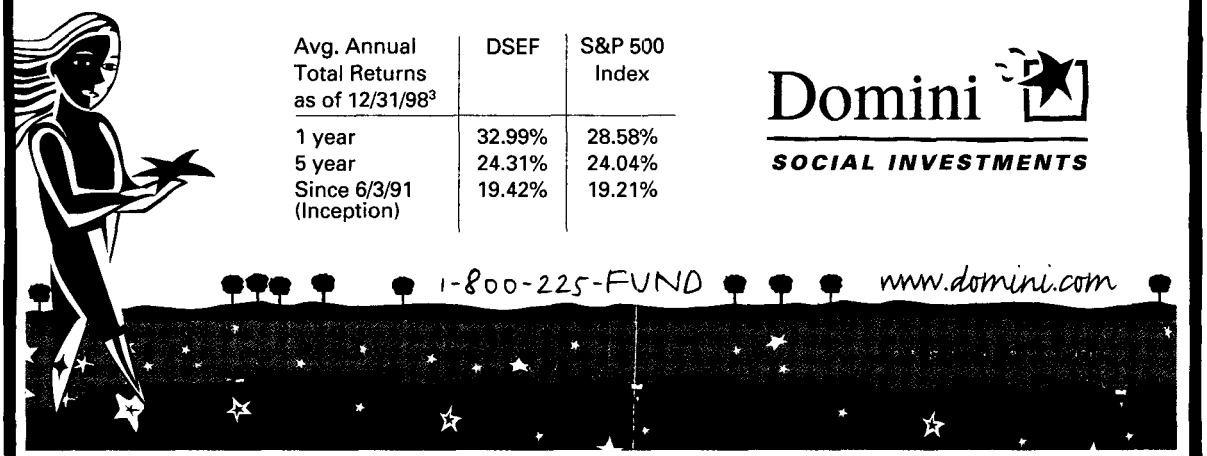

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Hucksters in Uniform

Abandoned by the elite, too many officers sell out to the military-industrial-Congressional complex

By Ralph Peters

In the Year of Our Lord 2020, the young pilots of America's armed forces will fly aircraft designed in a previous century for that earlier century's wars. The Army's ground troops will be weighed down by leviathan systems unsuited to the knife-fight conflicts of the coming decades. And the Navy will be splendidly prepared for the Second World War. Along the way, the United States may pay a trillion dollars for weapons that constrain rather than enable, that bankrupt the services, and that preserve cherished traditions at the expense of practical capabilities.

The world has changed even more profoundly than we have noticed. Nineteen eighty-nine marked not only the end of the Cold War, but the end of half a millennium of history dominated by the rise and fall of European empires. For the American people, a 250-year tradition of fighting empires came to a close—our major wars engaged empires and only empires, first those of kings, then those of demagogues. Even our Civil War was fought to cast off the vestiges of imperial inheritance, from human bondage to a loathsome aristocracy of landholders. The American purpose, unspoken but accomplished, was to destroy empires and their patterns of human organization. Now a quarter-millenium's mission has been fulfilled, and we are victorious but without compass.

Our military does not know what to do, so it does what it long has done: It organizes for grand wars against conventional militaries. No matter that the few such establishments still in existence do not, cannot, and will not threaten our nation and, at most, are positioned to annoy their neighbors—the portion of our wealth spent on arms will purchase systems to fight a reflection of ourselves. To exploit the weapons we are buying, we would have to share them with our enemies, or divide into teams and fight each other. Meanwhile, under-funded soldiers and Marines will do our nation's dirty work abroad, while in the skies and at sea we display a shining, irrelevant legacy. We have entered the age of the impassioned butcher, with a crude weapon in one hand, a cell phone in the other, and hatred in his soul. As of this writing, we see him in Kosovo, and we shall often meet his like again.

In this age of brilliance and dissolution, individuals and organizations long for verities. This manifests itself in religious fundamentalism, ethnic separatism, rejectionist terrorism, and Pentagon stubbornness. Our military hides behind technologies that give an illusion of progress, while preserving the old ways of thinking, organizing and fighting. But our military thinking, such as it is, looks backward, our organizations are ponderous and grotesquely inefficient, and, when allowed to fight by our political leadership, combat commanders must improvise their way to victory.

We are a land of fabulous, but not unlimited, wealth. As weapons costs increase—even as their versatility and dependability decrease—we must make sensible choices. Almost without exception, the services are determined to make disastrous ones. Our country will be ready for the war that will not come, but unprepared for the urbanizing, chaotic and morbid conflicts whose coming is already upon us.

Consider a few purchases in progress:

At a time when no power can match our control of the skies and none intends to confront us with dueling aircraft, we are buying three new fighters at a cost of $340 billion dollars, according to the Congressional Budget Office's accounting. The CBO's figure is that of an apologist, and does not include the metastasizing

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costs of fitting these systems to the force and keeping them there. Further, the General Accounting Office—our government's unpopular honest broker—states that "cost increases of 20 to 40 percent have been common for major weapon programs" and that "numerous programs experienced increases much greater than that." The trend-line for cost overruns rises sharply.

Of those three "indispensable" aircraft, the most promising is the Navy's F/A 18E/F, based upon a proven airframe and fulfilling at least some legitimate needs. The Navy insists the program is within budget, but maintains its numbers only by deferring problems. The F-22 Raptor, a supremely-unnecessary air-superiority fighter, is over budget $667 million years before the first plane has been produced for combat. The contractor, in a wonderful blackmail effort, has warned that costs will shoot higher if the Air Force does not continue to buy an unwanted aircraft, the C-130J, to keep assembly lines open. The final aircraft, the Joint Strike Fighter, is lagging in development, but being rushed forward. Its purchase will force an annual doubling of the aircraft procurement budget, even if costs do not increase one dollar beyond current projections. Yet, in an air campaign such as those in Yugoslavia or Iraq, it offers little more than planes we have.

Ultimately, we can fund these three evolutionary systems that slightly improve current capabilities (if, unlike the B-1 and B-2 bombers, they work as advertised). But, consequently, we will not be able to afford the truly revolutionary technologies that will become available early in the next century. We will be imprisoned by these lavish purchases of past designs. Worse still, the trend in military technologies is toward cheap kills of expensive systems. We may spend well over half a trillion dollars to buy aircraft that will be defeated easily by innovative technologies available at a discount. While the generals, admirals and the defense contractors who hire them upon their retirement will argue that threat-testing shows that these new aircraft are virtually invulnerable, the word in the Pentagon corridors is that tests that might expose weaknesses in the survivability of the aircraft are being watered down or simply avoided. Increasingly, our national defense is a business, and its business is not defense.

The Army, lumbering and unimaginative, cannot match the Air Force or Navy in the size of its expenditures, but exceeds them in its enthusiasm for yesteryear's solutions to tomorrow's problems. The centerpieces of its procurement program are the RAH-66 attack helicopter, an improved but far from revolutionary system little better than the currently-fielded AH-64 Apache, and the Crusader, a leviathan artillery system that will be difficult to deploy, hard to re-supply, and irrelevant to the most frequent threats the Army will face. Obsessed with building the perfect division at Fort Hood, Texas, the Army refuses to accept that the number one requirement for the future is the ability to get out of Texas on short notice. The Army is so overweight it cannot get to a crisis promptly. In an age when global mobility based upon advanced concepts of organization and lethality is the core military requirement, the Army's combat systems grow ever heavier, ever more costly, and ever more dependent upon a sprawling maintenance infrastructure. Instead of investing in research and development to design weapons for the future, the Army is determined to perfect the past.

Bewildered by the utter disappearance of enemy fleets, the Navy cruises toward the iceberg of irrelevance, still buying Congressionally-beloved submarines and surface combatants that have little combat power but enjoy tremendous political patronage. The Air Force and Army at least face genuine threats, if not those they crave. The best our Navy can do is to provide expensive, marginal firepower from inefficient ships and diplomatically-useful but low-combat-power aircraft carriers.

Beyond their dreary hurrah rhetoric, not one of these services has developed a doctrine for our changed world.

And what about the Marine Corps? Breaking ranks, the Marines have taken an honest look at the likely future of conflict and have begun to prepare for it—mind you, this praise comes from a retired Army officer and traditional rival of the Corps. Accustomed to doing things on the cheap, the Marines have developed innovative doctrine and training to prepare for everything from sorting refugees to fighting in the hell of urban warfare. The Marine Corps is the only defense bargain the taxpayer gets among the services.

Given the traditional image of the Marines as straight of back, straight of mind, and straight into the wall, it's startling to encounter more freedom of thought, impassioned internal debate, and plain honesty in the Corps than anywhere else in our defense establishment. Even the Marine Corps's primary acquisition program, the V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft (an ugly hybrid of helicopter and propeller transport) fits actual strategic and tactical requirements—it moves forces into combat quickly, with ten times the survival rate of the best transport helicopter. It isn't glamorous, only useful.

The generals and admirals who recommend or

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acquiesce in the purchase of most of the systems we are buying resemble the middle-aged man who buys a Porsche he cannot afford instead of the family van he needs. Our military is short of spare parts, training funds, trucks and infantrymen. We are buying the future force the generals and admirals, Congressmen and contractors want, not the one we will need. This is waste just short of treason.

Why, in the face of daily evidence of the changed nature of conflict, do we insist on buying systems of marginal or no relevance? Tradition is sometimes the reason, often the excuse. Congressional pork chopping is a major factor—President Eisenhower got it only two-thirds right: We face a defense-industrial-Congressional complex. Defense contractors contribute mightily to political campaigns, as well as providing the world's most expensive jobs in voting districts. In the defense community, corporate welfare is an art form. All this is clearly wrong. So why do the generals or admirals, whose patriotism is ever on their lips, fail to take a stand even against a rival service's gold-plated mistakes?

The real blame for the practical and moral shambles in which our military finds itself lies with our nation's elite, whose priviledged members turned their backs on military service when our Indochina wars gave them an excuse.

The reason is greed. Anyone who has served in the Pentagon has slipped on the slime trails that retired generals and admirals leave in their wake as they navigate the hallways bearing a defense contractor's business card with their name on it. The employment of retired senior officers by the nation's largest, increasingly-monopolisitic defense contractors is a scandal costing the taxpayer hundreds of billions of dollars, and it may cost our troops their lives. These men wear flags upon their lapels, but their minds are on the money. Their actions are not illegal because we have legalized corruption. When, in the mid-1980s, a few voices on Capitol Hill called for closing this particular revolving door, representatives from the defense industry and the threatened officers themselves put on their red-white-and-blue war-paint and chanted that the defense industry needed the expertise of senior officers. But colonels and captains, warrant officers and sergeants are the ones who have current expertise. Generals and admirals have connections.

We have seen the Babbitization of the officer corps, the rise of the huckster and shill with stars on his shoulders, and we will pay dearly for it. Like the small-minded, grasping anti-hero of Sinclair Lewis's novel, our senior leaders spout moralistic and patriotic slogans, but go for the bucks. Certainly, some retired four stars—men like Generals Colin Powell, John Galvin, Barry McCaffrey, and many a Marine flag officer—have continued to serve their country in other fields. But most insiders take the money. Often, if a general or admiral is not employed by a defense contractor, it tells you he was not a member of the club.

In our time, not one senior officer has resigned over waste. And none will.

Who is to blame? In the end, not the generals and admirals themselves so much. They are only living up to the values of their lower-middle-class backgrounds: speak piously and grasp vigorously. They are not all without genuine patriotism, but they have been accorded privilege for so long by the system they served that they have come to confuse the national interest with their self-interest. We cannot expect today's military to think, because the thinking men have left the military. Neither rigorous reflection nor self-criticism are common virtues among senior officers. Only a few of these men are willfully venal or consciously corrupt. Most simply rationalize their behavior, convincing themselves that the armed forces truly need the systems for which their service has acquired an appetite or their employer a contract.

The real blame for the practical and moral shambles in which our military finds itself lies with our nation's elite, whose privileged members turned their back on military service when our Indochina wars gave them an excuse.

Here I must inject a personal note—I never shed blood upon the field of Sidwell Friends, nor did I fight the battles of Yale Law. I am a miner's son, and my father was a self-made man who un-made himself during my youth. Education was not a family legacy, and my kin belonged to the United Mine Workers of America, not to Skull and Bones. My forebears fought this country's wars from the bottom ranks, and I began my own military career as a private. I have felt the full arrogance of those to whom

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much was given and, personally, wish that I might come to bury the elite, not to praise them. Yet, those who would rise need examples to emulate. It grates on me to write it, but our military needs the return of the nation's elite to the officer corps, to the extent that a traditional elite, with its spotty but essential ideals of service, still exists.

Certainly, our nation's elite never provided a majority, or even a large minority, of the officer corps even in wartime. When they served, the Navy was preferred by the bluebloods, the Army by the newbloods. Plenty of the well-to-do did well by avoiding service, paying a three-hundred-dollar bounty to avoid service in our Civil War, or finding placement in an "essential" government job in World War II, or donning a Brooks Brothers uniform to serve Father's friend in Washington or London for the duration. But enough served to make a difference. It takes only a bit of seasoning to make the stew.

The elite, too, produced its cowards and incompetents. But it also produced officers such as George Washington and George Patton, Robert E. Lee and George Marshall (the latter sprung of small-town gentry—even slight privilege once inspired obligation). Those officers had been imbued with social rules of integrity, both moral and financial, that set a tone for others to study and attain. Imagine but one of the men named above accepting a retirement job flogging metal for Lockheed Martin or Northrop Grumman. Such men knew when to take a stand, and would have turned in their stars before they acquiesced in looting the public.

Of course, many of our finest officers rose from humble origins. But Dwight Eisenhower served under and looked up to Marshall; in Mexico, Grant admired the golden Lee. Moral quality is infectious. The military knows this, and speaks nobly of leadership by example. But the men who mouth those words now speak of ghosts.

Vietnam harmed our nation less than commentators imagine, but struck our military a savage, lasting blow. In each war until then, the sons of Harvard and Princeton served. Their names are etched on memorials to the dead. But something happened in our Indochina years. We fought worse wars, but thought them better. Somehow, in a manner Sociology does not explain, those who benefited most from America arrived at a new assumption that privilege no longer carried a burden of responsibility. Perhaps it only marks the decrepitude of the old elite—surely, they are not the social factor they once were. Yet the best of them are missed. Today, the military's uniforms do not even fit properly (except for the Marines again), and the sense of self-sacrifice, despite a torrent of self-congratulatory rhetoric, barely finds a place in the upper ranks. Young officers still believe in our country, middle rankers serve it with increasing cynicism, and the generals sell it. We have come a long way down.

I do not believe there was ever a perfect world or a perfect military. Upper-crust cadets mocked Tom Jackson the bumpkin, who was as stolid and dreary as a stone wall, and Grant won brief approval only because he could outride them all—but when he led victorious armies the officers from privileged backgrounds lost no chance to brand the hero a drunk. McClellan was closer to the elite than Sherman, and the South's highest sons brought the Confederacy low with their love of Walter Scott and slaughter. But enough men served who had been bred to take a stand—and who could afford to walk away from a career.

As I write, we are waging a thoughtless demi-war in the Balkans. In a curious manner, it illustrates our loss of moral example. The shared drabness of service no longer informs president or senator, and ignorance of military matters rules. When the Kennedys no longer serve, the Clintons will not. Today's aspiring politicians regard military service as a blue-collar detour unworthy of their time. As a result, an administration unparalleled in its arrogance has blundered into a disaster that has swiftly cost a people its homeland, that threatens America's last shreds of strategic credibility, and that may gut the NATO alliance. While weeks lie between this electronic dash of ink and the printed page, even a miraculous turnabout in the Balkans will not erase the incompetence with which the adventure was begun. At the heart of our nation's government, not one person has worn a uniform. We have seen the Babbitization of the Presidency, too.

The past is a dangerous trap. Our military is caught in it. Perhaps my longing to see our national elite return to military service is only another lapse into nostalgia. But we have an Army run by a "Board of Directors" that is a combination mafia conference and small-town business club, a Navy intent on fighting against the future rather than against our nation's likely enemies, and an Air Force whose only strategy is budgetary gluttony. Something must be done. We are about to spend that trillion dollars (perhaps less, but don't count on it) on an arsenal of mediocrity. If no one rises to lead our military by example, our next significant expenditure may be in lives. ●

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The Noblest Calling

The difference one teacher can make

By Colman McCarthy

WATCHING THE CHILDREN OF Garrison Elementary School enter their cafeteria at lunch time, it's not hard to identify the students of Mark Lewis. They're the ones carrying books. Biographies, short stories, essays, poetry. The cafeteria noise and chatter isn't enough to keep them from reading a page or two of their books in the next half hour.

At Garrison Elementary, in a poor and working-poor neighborhood a mile north of the White House but a world away economically and politically, the children in Mark Lewis' class have lucked out. They have a teacher gifted with fire, one who burns with three beliefs. First, growing up minority and poor shouldn't mean growing up hopeless. Second, children who are long-shots for success have a greater chance if they enjoy at least one positive educational contact in school—a teacher with energy and ideals—at an early age. Third, for his students, he is that teacher.

I have known Mark Lewis since he came to Garrison in 1993. When in need of an inspirational lift, as well as some tips on the pedagogical arts of teaching, his classroom is among the ones I head for. It's also one of the places I bring my own students.

After one of these recent adventures, a student of mine was moved to write a thank-you letter.

"Dear Mr. Lewis: I had the pleasure of coming to your class and helping out with your kids for the day. My name is Lisa Keskitalo and I'm a student of Colman McCarthy's at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. I'm writing not to just thank you for welcoming me into your classroom but also for helping me to realize something about myself. You see, up until my visit to Garrison, I had set my eyes on a possible career as a high school teacher or college professor. When I left your school, my sentiments had changed completely because I realized how much more amazing and powerful it is to teach young kids. Yours were absolutely beautiful in many ways. They were sweet to me and you could see how much they craved learning in all its forms. When Colman told my class how you decided to leave the Library of Congress for these kids, I was touched. I completely understand why because they are all so amazing. If it weren't for my after school obligations (I'm a ballet dancer and practice every day), then I would come to Garrison to help out your kids. Please tell them that I loved the visit and love all of them. Thanks again not only for allowing me to help your class but also thanks for making a difference in those kids' lives. This world's heroes are people like you who touch young people's lives, including myself. You may not see it like that, but I do and I thank you for it. I hope that one day too, I will touch the lives of kids in a fourth grade class.

Kind regards, Lisa Keskitalo

On delivering that note to Mark Lewis, I asked one of his students to stand in front of the room and read it aloud to the class. Attention was rapt. At the end, applause rocked the room. Here were the thoughts of an outsider, expressing in a few words all the respect and affection the children themselves had for a revered teacher who can "touch the lives of kids."

How a 40-year old American Jew from upstate New York who speaks Arabic and Hebrew found himself among some 500 African-American kids in a public school in one of the nation's most mismanaged school systems is a tale of unlikely twists and undreamed-of rewards.

After graduating from Tulane in 1981, Lewis studied for two years at Hebrew University in Israel. Wanting to expand his mind and outlook, he came to

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Washington to earn a Masters in Arabic Studies at Georgetown University. From 1985 to 1992, he worked as a Middle East researcher and writer at the Library of Congress.

About then, looking for a diversion or two from the thinking life, Lewis began volunteering as a literacy tutor at an inner-city Catholic school. "I had a class with five kids," he recalled recently outside his second-floor classroom as his charges were leaving for the day. "I loved it. I said to myself, 'I should be doing this full time.'"

A few years later—after taking teacher certification classes at Trinity College, after sending out resumes to 25 District of Columbia elementary schools—he was.

The day before school opened in 1993, the principal at Garrison phoned Lewis to say she would take a chance on him. He was heaved into deep waters: "When I showed my class list to another teacher, he sighed. 'You're in for the worst year of your life. These are the worst kids in the school.' He was right. They turned out to be terrible."

No quitter, Lewis stuck it out and survived. The next year, the principal moved him from fourth grade to a second-third combination. He taught that way three years and then was asked to teach the second grade group the next year in third grade. He continued with them to the fourth grade, his class now.

In Lewis' philosophy of education, the benefits of continuity—three years with the same class, and maybe more through fifth and sixth—are immense. Bonding occurs. "Sure, you get attached to the kids," Lewis says. He knows them as human beings to be inspired, not educational units to be processed through the system. In his classroom, it is noticeable that Lewis speaks conversationally, with no vocabulary dumbing down because they're nine-year olds. His speaking tone and manner differ little from a professor's in an honors seminar: "I never talk down to them. I treat them with respect. That's important. I try to use sophisticated vocabulary. They pick up on that and it shows up later. In their latest Stanford 9 reading test, 75 percent of the class scored in the advanced category."

I checked. Those results are among the highest for any fourth grade class in the city.

It isn't total linguistic sophistication in the Lewis classroom. During discussions of current social issues, which as a man of opinions he relishes, Lewis reads from newspapers to get the kids talking. In a recent free-for-all, he held up the front pages of *USA Today* and *The Washington Post*, pointing to headlines on the same lead story. Which headline do you prefer? he asked. "*USA Today*'s!" It was three words, the *Post*'s 10 words. "*USA Today* is a fourth grader's dream paper," Lewis quipped.

How to find more innovators like Mark Lewis and get them into classrooms? Recruit them. Recruit women and men who care about thinking and think about caring, and then put them among children.

Throughout the year, Lewis communicates regularly with parents, averaging between 20 and 25 phone calls a week. Many teachers, if they take time to talk with parents at all, phone home only with the bad news of a failing grade or a child acting up. Lewis' calls range from praising a parent's effort at creating a learning environment at home to talking about a child's progress in reading or self-discipline.

With a happy and uplifting family life himself—he is married to a lawyer and is the father of a two-year-old—Lewis takes time to visit the families of his Garrison children and often invites them to his home for dinners.

This closeness, he believes, serves to keep the students enthused about learning. If he is personally central to their lives, chances increase that education will be central, too. "I can tell," Lewis says, "that my students are pumped up about their futures. They're at the stage where the world is theirs. In their dreams and imagination, they think they can do what they want. I encourage them to think that if you work your butt off and push yourself, you can become self-sufficient. That's the goal. Even including the most troubled child in my class, I can say that none of them has a sense of defeat."

Because he chooses to cross racial, cultural and economic boundaries and take students into his life in personal ways well beyond routine professional requirements, Lewis is an anomaly in U.S. education. It is no accident that his students are at the highest levels of tested excellence. Nor is it accidental that his philosophy of teaching was not picked up during his certification period or by heeding the counsel of

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education school experts.

In *The Discipline of Hope*, the veteran teacher-Herbert Kohl writes: "Knowing and caring about your students is not merely an academic matter, but is essential to shaping learning for them and a challenge to take them into your life and fight for survival and growth as if they were your own children ... I believe that one key to making sustained changes is finding teachers who care about their students and are willing to become personally involved with their lives. The craft of teaching can develop; the love it requires cannot be legislated or trained."

How to find more innovators like Mark Lewis and get them into classrooms? Recruit them, how else? Recruit women and men who care about thinking and think about caring, and then put them among children. Not among certifiers. Not among testers. Not among task forces. Not among blowhard experts at education conferences. Just among children. They're everywhere. The planet is packed with them.

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Journalism Award

MARCH 1999

KATHERINE BOO

"D.C.'s Troubled System for the Retarded"

The Washington Post

In this exhaustively researched and compassionately written series, Kate Boo traces the breakdown of D.C.'s system for [illegible] uncovering stunning stories of neglect and gross exploitation by shady individuals running group homes for the [illegible] retarded. That exploitation didn't come cheap—D.C. taxpayers were paying about $100,000 per year for each resident [illegible] who could not reside with family members or live on his or her own. Boo's intrepid reporting, sharp eye for [illegible] and vivid writing produced a testament to suffering that no one could dismiss—and D.C. officials are making noises about [illegible] a miserable experiment with deinstitutionalization.

Last month we failed to recognize another outstanding *Post* article on local government:

FEBRUARY 1999

DAVID MONTGOMERY

"D.C.'s Bureaucracy: A Day in the Maze"

The Washington Post

[illegible] summarized the findings of 29 Post reporters who spoke with D.C. residents about their experiences with the [illegible] agencies. Some residents were pleased with the quality of D.C's agencies, but most were frustrated by incompetent [illegible] and a Byzantine bureaucracy. The verdict? D.C. Mayor Tony Williams has a long way to go.

THE MONTHLY JOURNALISM AWARD is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations to [illegible] The Washington Monthly Journalism Award [illegible] washmo@washingtonmonthly.com [illegible]

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What The Public Schools Can Learn From Hollywood And George W. Bush

By Christian Peters

I am a middle school teacher in San Bernardino, Calif.; a small blue collar city out where the eastern fringe of the Southern California sprawl begins to dissipate into the Mojave desert. I have been at it for five years now and truly love my work more and more each year. And just as much, I like the people I work with. Teachers are by and large the most caring, decent and altruistic group you'll find anywhere. Yet one thing has increasingly nagged at me over the five years I have taught. It has to do with my life before teaching.

Prior to becoming a teacher, I was an aspiring screenwriter living in Los Angeles and circulating through the hustling, scuffling fringes of the entertainment industry. During those Hollywood wannabe days there were three people who, in retrospect, embody for me the creative, optimistic, resourceful best of The Business. Far from being the hot shot, Tarentino-esque prodigies I most envied at the time, they were Jay, Mike, and Ed, my co-workers in the wire service room at the hyper-conservative *Investor's Business Daily* where I supported myself by clipping articles and writing quarterly report summaries. They were like me, aspiring something-or-others in their twenties; Jay from Pennsylvania, Mike from England and Ed from Michigan. They were a few of the thousands of young people from all over the country who populate Los Angeles' west side, toiling in restaurants, video stores, back offices and telemarketing boiler rooms while pursuing their writing, acting, directing, producing, songwriting, or maybe all-of-the-above dreams in their spare time.

Christian Peters *is a public school teacher in San Bernardino, California.*

What was truly wonderful about Jay, Mike, and Ed though was the way that they would bring that otherwise achingly dull workplace to life. Virtually every morning one or the other of them would come barreling into the office nearly exploding with the story idea, sitcom character, cartoon, or song he'd stayed up late the night before composing. And not only were they eager to share their own ideas, when they didn't have any of their own they would relentlessly pester me to share pages from whatever screenplay I was working on. They were forever on the lookout for an opportunity to collaborate or form a partnership. Indeed, one of the things that made me realize I wasn't cut out for the movie biz was seeing how much harder these guys hustled than I was willing to.

Now, five years later, despite my being engaged in a more satisfying profession with more nobly intentioned colleagues, I find myself... well... missing Jay, Mike, and Ed. Not that there aren't teachers as creative and dynamic as they were. It's just that I have a hard time finding anyone who is eager to share new ideas or seek any kind of feedback whatsoever on his or her work.

Now I have plenty of friends among my current co-workers. Indeed, I know and chat easily with all of them and socialize with many of them. But I have hardly a clue what they do in their classrooms, what they are accomplishing or not accomplishing, or what I could learn from any of them.

So much is the organization of secondary school curriculum and the school day still a compartmentalized, factory-like industrial-age artifact that, like an assembly line worker, I spend my days entirely isolated in my little assembly bay (classroom) absorbed in slamming rivets of knowledge into the literally hun-

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dreds of kids who sail by me at 45-minute intervals. I have little time to think or involve myself with anything else or—even worse than an assembly line—any way of assessing or finding out if my rivets have held in place.

In public education, there is little time and even less incentive for teachers to exchange ideas, critique and push each other as aspiring screenwriters do in Hollywood. Indeed, among many teachers it's considered almost a faux pas to inquire too much into what they actually do in their classrooms or to ask to observe one of them; an intrusion on the order of asking about their religion or their sex life. Teaching's dirty secret is that we're all intensely insecure and uncertain of just what the hell it is we're supposed to be doing in those classrooms. At worst, we suspect that everybody else knows what we're supposed to be doing except us.

In public education, there is little time and even less incentive for teachers to exchange ideas, critique, and push each other as aspiring screenwriters do in Hollywood.

What Hollywood can teach our schools lies in the passion of Jay, Mike, and Ed and their motivation, even as relatively self-centered people, to share and push and collaborate with one another. It is also directly traceable to an upheaval that took place in the entertainment industry 40 years ago. Over an amazingly brief time during the 1950s and early '60s, the major Hollywood studios were forced to completely redefine their role in the movie making business. As the '50s began, the studios were structured along a highly centralized, top-down, factory model, much as the vast majority of school districts and individual school sites still are today. But with the Paramount antitrust decision of 1949 and the simultaneous advent of television and the increased power of big stars, independent producers, and talent agents, the studios were forced to alter their structure drastically in order to survive.

What they did was stop doing the things they could no longer do effectively—control talent and the creative process—and focus on what they could still uniquely do: provide independent producers with cash and access to the vast technical and distribution infrastructure they still commanded. A new system therefore evolved whereby independent production companies (run by dynamic, creative, risk-taking Jay, Mike, and Eds) contract with studios based on their proven track records to produce a given number of films over a given period of time. They are budgeted, given office space on studio lots and almost total creative freedom in return for which they are expected to generate a hit movie or TV series. If they do they get renewed. If they don't, they're homeless. Simple.

Now whether this structure is a good formula for artistic success or even for the mental health of its participants is open to debate. What is not open to debate, however, is its monumental economic success. During the past 25 years—often referred to as the "Blockbuster era"—the profits of most of the "Big Seven" studios have grown at a greater rate than during any equivalent period in history. And most importantly, it's a system that draws more and more bright, ambitious, nervy Jays, Mikes, and Eds to L.A. every year; people willing to work their asses off for years—despite the slim odds of success and near-certain prospect of poverty and repeated rejection—in hopes of eventually landing a big studio development deal.

Is there anything the virtuous world of public education can learn from these on-the-make Hollywood types? Consider that the nation's school system today is still arguably at the same place the studio system was 40 years ago. It is stuck in an industrial-age organizational structure that is widely perceived as no longer getting the job done. The only difference is that while the old studio system failed because it could no longer maintain iron control over the creative means of production, in the case of the school system, the problem is the ambiguity of the product itself. That is, the main difference between schools now and schools say, 25 years ago, is that they are expected to educate a vastly increased and more diverse population of students while at the same time addressing the particular needs of an ever-increasing number of special groups. Obviously this makes the standardized, centralized, assembly line approach to education, which worked so well for the better part of the century, entirely obsolete.

So how would the Hollywood approach apply to schools? Easy. Just like the studios in the '50s and '60s, school districts and state education bureaucracies need to stop trying to do what they can no longer do well—mandate educational strategies for addressing

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an impossible diversity of educational needs—and focus on what they can do well: allocate resources and monitor and reward achievement (i.e. improved school achievement = hit movies), thereby freeing the front-line troops at the school sites to figure out the best way of meeting their students' needs while still being held accountable to the bottom line.

There are currently only a few states, most of them southern and conservative such as Texas, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Virginia, that have taken steps toward this approach. The furthest along and most demonstrably successful of these states appears to be, believe it or not, Texas under the leadership of, believe it or not, George W. Bush. There the state has largely withdrawn from the business of mandating curriculum approaches and focused almost entirely on establishing strict, concrete standards of achievement that every school is expected to meet.

For instance, when Bush is asked about his position on bilingual education, instead of proffering the expected conservative-nativist boiler plate, he regularly surprises listeners by saying he really doesn't care how schools choose to teach as long as they show concrete results. That's state policy. Schools, like Hollywood production companies, are given near-total freedom to produce a successful product in the manner they see fit and are in return expected to produce concrete results in the form of improved standardized test scores. If they succeed, dollars, resources and recognition flow their way. If they fail, they risk state takeover and the firing or forced transfer of their faculty and administrators. Simple. What's more, the evidence dramatically suggests that this approach is working. Texas' students performance on standardized tests have risen to consistently place in the top 10 nationwide. Meanwhile my own state, California, with a nearly identical socioeconomic spread and ethnic diversity, continues to languish in the bottom 10. It is no coincidence that the California education hierarchy also continues to issue endless top-down prescriptive edicts while failing to hold schools accountable for maintaining any ironclad standards.

Fortunately, Congress brought the rest of us a step closer to the Texas approach by passing the Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999. The "Ed-Flex" bill permits all 50 states to waive some of the burdensome regulations that are currently attached to federal aid for schools. But it's too early to tell what kind of effect the bill will have. Many states may shrink from the kind of strict accountability Texas has imposed, largely because the four main influence groups in education—school administrators, teachers' unions, conservative politicians and "the education elite" (education professors and writers)—don't like Texas' outcome-based approach.

Administrators don't like it because it diminishes their role. Unions (along with the liberal politicians with whom they are closely aligned) don't like it because they feel it leads down the slippery slope toward pitting teacher against teacher. Many conservative politicians are still suspicious of it because it allows teachers too much freedom to pursue liberal agendas such as bilingual classrooms and "whole language" reading instruction. Finally, intellectuals don't like it because they view the standardized tests upon which the state standards are primarily based as crass political raw meat that has little to do with the development of the "whole child."

All of these arguments have some merit, but they all equally fail to see the scarier writing on the wall in the form of private school voucher initiatives, the growth in private school enrollment in general by those who can afford it, and even the dramatic growth in home schooling that recently merited a *Newsweek* cover story. As the studio moguls realized in the '50s, the system was changing with or without them, and they had to do something to drastically alter the way they did business. The Progressive era education system in this country is fast fading and will eventually disappear as surely as did the old studio system of the 1920s - '50s. And education must change just as Hollywood did. ●

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The Velvet Prison

Why tenure isn't necessarily good for teaching or scholarship

BY ROBERT WORTH

LAST YEAR A JUNIOR PROFESSOR IN Russian Studies at a major East Coast university—let's call her Karen—breathed a sigh of relief as she delivered the manuscript of her first book to the publisher. The book had already gleaned rapturous praise from some of the top people in her field, so her future seemed virtually assured. But the next day Karen's adviser told her that she'd have to publish another one if she wanted tenure. Why? Her department, after all, is full of senior people who haven't published anything in years, and who haven't even bothered to master the new research techniques that have become possible since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many of these people don't do much teaching either, since the number of undergraduates majoring in Russian has dropped precipitously in the last decade. If they worked at a private company, some of them would be sacked and Karen would be promoted.

They have tenure, however, and Karen doesn't. In theory, this means that they've proved their value to the university. In practice, it means they can't be fired no matter how little they contribute as teachers or scholars. Karen is quick to add that some senior professors in her field have adapted to the post-Soviet world. But many have not. "They've got tenure and they don't have to learn," she says. Meanwhile, Karen will have to work harder than ever to produce another book in the next two years, which is likely to cut into the time she has for her students. At the end of her sixth year, Karen will be judged by a faculty committee, which will consider her scholarship and gather recommendations from scholars at other universities. If they vote to grant tenure, her case will proceed to another committee, which will undertake its own review, and finally to the college president, who has the final word.

If Karen survives this harrowing process, her job will be guaranteed for life. She may well live up to that extraordinary trust by maintaining her high standards for the next four or five decades. However, she may also lose touch with the changes in her field, as so many of her colleagues have, and lose interest in teaching. Either way, she'll be rewarded with less teaching and much less need to prove her scholarship, as a new generation of junior faculty enters the tenure gauntlet.

If she doesn't survive, she may well join the army of "adjunct" or part-time professors who now constitute almost half the faculty in U.S. colleges and universities and do the bulk of the teaching. With no job security and (in some cases) no benefits, these academic journeymen skip frantically across the country in search of work, often forced to cobble several jobs together to make a living. As universities slowly cut back on tenured positions, the ranks of this discontented army will continue to grow, according to a study released in April by two Virginia researchers. Needless to say, this is not a formula for good teaching or good scholarship.

Karen's fate is not unusual. Academia is starting to bear an unsettling resemblance to 18th-century France: a majority with too few privileges tyrannized by a minority with too many. Tenure is the *ancien regime* that divides these two worlds, preventing schools from holding their faculty accountable or changing with the times. Many faculty would dispute this view and insist that tenure is necessary to maintain academic freedom and to attract talent to the profession. Those claims, however, are becoming increasingly hard to maintain. And tenure's defenders cannot dispute the fact that most people outside the academy see it as an increasingly outdated and unjustifiable perk. "It's nice to have job protection," says Jane Jervis, the president of Oregon's Evergreen College (which does not offer tenure), "but who has that now? I think it's important that people in academia

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understand that the rest of society sees that claim as preposterous. And the rest of society often has kids in school with a rotten teacher." If the professoriate doesn't want tenure to fall under the guillotine, it had better start paying attention to the case for reform.

Class Struggle

Tenure is an inheritance from the German "research model" that revolutionized American universities during the late 19th century. The idea was to insulate faculty from political and economic pressures by granting them job security. In exchange, they would enrich society with the knowledge gained in their unfettered pursuit of the truth.

The trouble was that "research" rapidly became a self-justifying enterprise, often conducted at the expense of the university's other major goal: teaching. This became increasingly true in the decades after World War II, according to a 1990 report from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as the focus moved "from the student to the professoriate, from general to specialized education, and from loyalty to the campus to loyalty to the profession." These skewed priorities have incited a barrage of critique from public intellectuals and the press in the past decade, and the academy has responded with pious assurances about the importance of teaching. But nothing has really changed, according to another Carnegie report released last year. Tenured faculty are teaching less than ever, while adjuncts and grad students face increasingly heavy teaching and research burdens.

In practice, the struggle for tenure forces junior faculty like Karen to give their teaching short shrift. "They tell you tenure decisions will be made on the basis of three things, research, teaching, and service to the university," says one Princeton professor who came up for tenure recently. "The formula you hear is 40/40/20. In my experience it's more like 90/5/5." Other faculty at major universities tend to offer the same story. All of them agree that being an outstanding teacher could help you, and being a lousy one might hurt. But the final decision often comes down to letters of recommendation from outside experts who "have no knowledge of your teaching and would have no interest in it," according to William Howarth, a senior professor in Princeton's English department. As a graduate student at Princeton, I knew of several faculty who had won awards and lots of acclaim for their teaching, but were denied tenure because they hadn't published enough, or not in the right places. Few schools have any real method of judging their faculty's teaching skills outside of student evaluation forms, and pedagogical training is almost unheard-of.

Once they get tenure, faculty have no incentive to put any more time into teaching. I'll never forget the day I handed a 60-page paper to one of my graduate professors at Princeton. The paper had cost me months of agonizing research and writing, so I was a little taken aback by my professor's response. "I have to catch a flight out to LA tonight," he said wearily, looking down at my thick stack of paper with unconcealed disdain. "I'll try to read it then." Two weeks later I got the paper back, with a single word scrawled on the last page: "Excellent." Apparently the in-flight film had been more alluring than my 60 pages on the American anti-imperialist movement. My professor wasn't lazy; he simply had no incentive to pay attention to students like me. He'd been hired by the university because of his international reputation as a scholar, and that reputation was likely to carry him even further if he kept it up—which he couldn't do if he wasted his time with student papers.

Even without the lure of research, tenure can be a kind of velvet prison, seducing people into a professional torpor that never ends. "Tenure can be a trap," one retired professor told me. "I've seen plenty of people who could have had much more dynamic careers if they had moved around more." Ask any faculty member for examples of "deadwood" and you'll hear some hilarious stories about the abuses tenure invites—off the record, of course. One young philosophy professor told me about two colleagues who had taken up dog-breeding and started a business as soon as they got tenure.

At ordinary teaching institutions, where people often end up teaching the same course year in and year out, the problem can be even worse. At many public universities and community colleges, professors are unionized, which adds another thick layer of job protection; like public school teachers, they have to do something illegal or clearly outrageous before the college will even consider the arduous process of firing them.

The rigors of the tenure process also encourage young academics to overspecialize, producing work whose scholarly value is marginal at best (who benefits from those papers on "Anality in *Little Dorrit*" and "Jungian archetypes in *Bewitched*"?) and exacerbating their fear of life outside the Ivory Tower. Nothing exemplifies this fear better than the subject

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of tenure reform. Many young professors and grad students have never held a real job, and despite the current job crisis in the humanities, they often seem to believe that the academy owes them a sinecure. Last year Elaine Showalter, then-president of the Modern Language Association, wrote a column in the MLA newsletter urging Ph.D. students to consider alternatives to the badly overcrowded academic market. "Nice Work, and We Can Get It," was her title. A harmless enough thought, you might suspect. But graduate students came down on her with a vengeance. The MLA Graduate Student Caucus published a furious response, deriding her "blame the victim pronouncements" and her "naive effort to get hold of our working lives and prospects with low-rent market metaphors."

Ultimately, the argument for tenure as a guarantee of academic freedom fails because the two concepts are separable.

What's truly astonishing is that these people aren't simply being snobby about non-academic jobs: The academy has literally blinded them to the power their credentials can wield in the world outside. As Showalter argued, refugees from academia tend to do extremely well in a variety of professions. Richard Preston, best-selling author of *The Hot Zone*, got his Ph.D. in English at Princeton; John Romano, who taught English at Columbia, now produces the TV show "Party of Five"; the list could go on and on. People with advanced degrees have every reason to be confident about their future, and to take risks with it. Yet the tenure system encourages them to behave like cautious old men who can't survive without a guarantee of lifetime employment.

Finally, tenure's rigidity makes it difficult for schools to adapt to changes in knowledge. When the collapse of the Soviet Union revolutionized the field of Russian Studies, tenure became an enormous stumbling block for the academy. That's not to say that all the older professors in the field should have been fired. Rather, a more accountable system would give universities a stick with which to keep them on the ball. It might also allow schools to fill sudden needs without hiring adjuncts—the slave labor of the academic world—as they currently tend to do. Instead, they could hire on a multi-year contract basis—anywhere from two to 10 years. All of these contracts would be more secure than the current adjunct arrangement, but they'd be more flexible, and far more accountable, than tenure.

Freedom's Just Another Word ...

Many professors will respond to these charges by reciting the standard American Association of University Professors line: tenure is necessary to maintain academic freedom. It's true that for much of this century there was good reason to believe that job security was necessary to protect a professor's freedom of speech. During the McCarthy era, a professor whose politics were a little too pink could be dismissed if he didn't have tenure, and more than a few were. One professor at a Florida university told me his adviser was fired from a Southern college for his too-liberal views on civil rights.

It's also true that witch-hunts like these could always recur. But they wouldn't be quite the same. For one thing, free speech was not protected at the state level until the late 1960s. A faculty member at a public university who announced that he was gay or communist could be fired with impunity. Thanks to a series of Supreme Court decisions, that's no longer true. Although the law doesn't apply to private schools, they tend to follow the public precedent. In any case, says Evergreen College's Jane Jervis, "if anyone was fired for ideological reasons, with or without tenure, they'd have the institution in court so fast you couldn't see straight." In fact, faculty regularly appeal their tenure decisions to the courts, at both public and private schools, and win. Sometimes the threat of a lawsuit alone can push a school to reconsider. That isn't necessarily a good thing, but it does suggest that the AAUP's position on academic freedom is a little paranoid.

"Academic freedom" can also be a code-word for freedoms that most of us cannot and would not expect to be granted. When I asked one University of Massachusetts professor for examples of people who might have been fired if they hadn't been tenured, he described a particle physicist who stopped doing particle research and started doing left-wing political organizing. "If he hadn't had tenure, he might have been fired," he told me ominously. Hmmm. Wasn't he hired to do particle research? When I asked an English professor the same question, he told me about a faculty dinner at which he had mentioned a course he

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was teaching on Gay Studies to an administrator seated next to him. The administrator frowned and wondered aloud whether that was worth a whole course. This anecdote was meant, I suppose, to illustrate that tenure protects English professors from those philistines who consider Gay Studies an unworthy subject (many of whom, it should be added, are gay). But as a recent Ph.D. in English, I can attest that junior faculty are in much greater danger of being fired if they *don't* teach Gay Studies.

Which brings us to the strangest thing about the standard defense of tenure as the bulwark of academic freedom: It ignores the academic freedom of untenured faculty, who constitute the majority of teachers in the country. And these are the people whose academic freedom may be most under threat, thanks to the constant pressures for conformity from within the academy. Despite the academy's nominal support for new ideas and unorthodox views, free spirits tend to find themselves left off of conference panels and scholarly publications, while the survivors learn to stay safely within the bounds of what's fashionable in their discipline. Forcing people to spend 12 years or more narrowing their interests to suit academic fashion in the quest for tenure "tends to knock the originality out of young academics," says Louis Menand, an English professor at the City University of New York.

Ultimately, the argument for tenure as a guarantee of academic freedom fails because the two concepts are separable. There's nothing to prevent a school from contractually guaranteeing academic freedom for all faculty members. The handful of colleges that currently operate without tenure already do so. And faculty at those schools don't feel that their academic freedom is under threat, according to a study by Richard Chait and Cathy Trower of Harvard's Project on Faculty Appointments. These schools tend to be unorthodox places with a high degree of loyalty to their faculty. However, it would be easy enough for more traditional schools to supplement a guarantee of academic freedom by forming an internal appeals committee, similar to the grievance panels most schools have already, to hear cases when faculty thought their academic freedom had been violated. J. Peter Byrne, a (tenured) law professor at Georgetown, has argued that such a committee could protect academic freedom effectively and without much cost or bureaucratic trouble.

The most effective defense of tenure may be the most practical one: faculty still tend to view it as nonnegotiable. When the regents of the University of Minnesota tried to reform the tenure code in 1996, the faculty threatened a union drive, and compromise became impossible. In the end Tom Reagan, the chair of the board of trustees, conceded that "we will not be revisiting the tenure code for at least a year and a half and probably never." It's also been difficult for top-ranked universities to draw talent without offering tenure. "You can't be competitive if you don't offer tenure," declared Boston University president John Silber in 1995, after BU had tried and failed to lure economics professors to non-tenured positions.

That may be changing. One alternative to tenure that has begun to gain ground is post-tenure review, whereby tenured faculty are subject to periodic evaluations by fellow teachers. This has been tried in about a dozen schools around the country, with the oldest program going back 10 years. So far, the results are mixed. "The evaluations tend to be love letters," says Harvard's Cathy Trower, and even when they're not the consequences are minimal. No one has been fired because of a post-tenure review. However, adds Trower, "the reviews have been very successful at encouraging fallow faculty to take early retirement." That's no small consideration, given that retirement is no longer mandatory and that many departments will soon start to look like geriatric homes.

Another approach has been to offer faculty a choice: traditional tenure, or a limited-term contract at a higher salary and (in some cases) better sabbatical options. North Carolina's Evergreen College started offering 10-year contracts at higher pay as an alternative to tenure in 1992, and so far about half the faculty have accepted the contracts. The Boston University School of Management started doing the same thing in 1995, with roughly the same results. "Our objective is not to get rid of people," says BU Dean Louis Lataif, "but to find ways such that you need to get rid of fewer. If my theory is correct, it will make people more accountable, and yield a group of scholars who'll have fewer problems."

These ideas still sound like heresy to many academics. But sooner or later they'll have to face the fact that tenure is already being reformed, like it or not—and in the worst possible way. As universities slowly cut back on tenure-track lines and replace them with adjunct positions, the majority of faculty may soon be without any job security *or* academic freedom. If the trend continues, there'll be no excuse for not offering these people a better deal—guaranteed benefits, longer contracts, better pay. Once that happens, the justification for granting anyone a job for life will start to look thinner than ever. ●

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Passing the Lemons

If tenure creates a lack of accountability for college professors, the problem is far worse at the K-12 level. In most states, teachers become permanent employees of their school district after completing a three to five year probationary period. After that they can be fired for "just cause," but the district must prove its case against a well-prepared teachers' union in an agonizing process that can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and last for years. According to a 1994 study by the New York State School Boards Association, it takes New York districts an average of 455 days and $177,000 to dismiss a teacher. With appeals, the average cost jumps to $317,000. Principals can and do transfer lousy teachers to other schools—a ritual administrators call "The Dance of the Lemons" or "The Passing of the Trash." But someone will end up with that teacher.

Tenure reform efforts tend to focus on moving to a system of renewable contracts, such as most private schools use. The past few years have seen a number of state efforts to accomplish that, but they've generally been stymied by the unions. Oregon, for instance, supposedly "abolished" tenure in 1997, moving to a system of rolling two-year contracts. In fact, the new law isn't very different from the old. It has some real advantages: school administrators are now easier to fire, unions can't instantly appeal a school's effort to put a teacher on a remedial plan, and it's easier to ease older teachers out of the profession. But despite the much-ballyhooed end to tenure, teachers still enjoy more or less the same protection after their probationary period. "It takes a long time and enormous expense to dismiss teachers, and this law has not helped it one bit or changed it," says Carol Matorazzo, deputy superintendant for the Portland, Oregon public school district.

Florida won a similarly uncertain victory in 1997 after a ferocious battle between statehouse reformers led by Education Commissioner Frank Brogan and the teachers' unions. The new law does have at least one real advantage over the old: poor-performing teachers used to have two years to improve, and that's been reduced to 90 days. Teachers' salaries are also determined partly by their skill, as opposed to their seniority, the only measure of pay in most states. Still, "tenure lite," as Brogan calls the new law, remains a thick protective layer against real accountability in the schools.

The standard union response to reform is that teachers deserve some due process protection, because without it principals could dismiss them for arbitrary or political reasons. There's some truth to this. My brother taught for several years at a San Francisco public school, where he was widely recognized by students and teachers alike as an outstanding teacher. His principal, who had virtually no administrative experience and was widely disliked, developed a personal animus against my brother and surely would have fired him if he could have (as it was, he deliberately manipulated his schedule in ways that made him, and other teachers in the school, miserable).

Nonetheless, there's no excuse for not finding a better way to remove bad teachers, who can have a devastating effect on morale throughout a school as well as on their own students. The National Education Associaton, the country's largest teachers' union, finally acknowledged this two years ago. "No one believes it should take four or five or six years to get rid of a teacher who is ineffective," NEA president Bob Chase declared in a 1997 speech. "If there is a bad teacher in one of our schools, then we must do something about it." Since then the NEA has made small noises about "streamlining" teacher tenure laws, but it has not done anything about them, and its state affiliates continue to resist change with all their might.

Instead, the NEA and its smaller sister, the American Federation of Teachers, have offered up their own approach to the problem of teacher quality: peer review. Essentially, this is a way for teachers to review each other's performance and make recommendations to the district about who should be fired or put on an improvement plan. Teachers who've gone through peer review say it makes teachers and administrators alike more vigilant about the level of teaching in their schools. But the evidence is still pretty thin—peer review is still only being used in a handful of districts around the country, despite the national unions' rhetorical committment to it. Amazingly, many locals still resist the idea that teachers should be subject to evaluation, even though they evaluate students all day long.

The real problem with peer review is that it doesn't provide an outside perspective on teacher performance. State medical licensing boards and police review boards, dominated by doctors and policemen, often come under fire for protecting their own. There's no reason to believe teachers are any different. Peer review is a step in the right direction, but the profession won't have the kind of accountability it needs until principals and intelligent laymen have a voice in weeding out bad teachers. And that won't happen until the current tenure laws change. —**RW**

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Easy Pickings

Few public officials are better paid—or less accountable—than school administrators

BY JAMES HEANEY

MOST BUFFALO SCHOOL administrators are former teachers who have learned that there is good money to be made running a poor district. School officials accounted for 81 of the city's 100 highest paid administrators in 1996-97.

How much better paid are school administrators than their city government counterparts? Seventy-five made more in 1996-97 than Mayor Anthony Masiello, who ranked 91st overall among city administrators. The schools' top budget official earned nearly $24,000 more than the mayor's chief number cruncher. Seventeen principals made more than the police commissioner, including four who pulled down more than $100,000. Even the School Board's secretary made more than most of the city government's top administrators; Alvina Staley earned $63,189, much of it in overtime, and her pay topped those of the commissioners of parks, streets, and community development.

Sixty-five percent of the administrators in the city who made over $65,000 work for the schools. In 1996-97, 191 school administrators were paid more than $65,000, including 40 who earned more than $80,000. Superintendent James Harris topped the list: His $135,000 salary makes him the city's highest paid public official. Benefits for city school administrators are vastly superior to those of the mayor's management staff. School administrators who retired the summer of 1996, for example, walked away with an average of $49,940 in early retirement incentives and compensation for unused sick time; department heads in the city get nothing when they leave.

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While the city high school principals' pay—$94,486—is higher than those in the suburbs, most of their students' academic performance is not. Most city high schools are at the bottom of the achievement ladder among schools. Student performance is not tied to principals' pay.

The district's administrators rank among the best paid managers in city government—and the least accountable. They're rarely evaluated. And forget about demotions or dismissals. All but a handful have what amounts to lifetime job security. Even assistant superintendents are members of a union and expected to supervise and, if necessary, discipline fellow members of their union.

The situation in Buffalo is worse than in many other districts, but in many ways it typifies the entrenched bureaucrats found in school systems throughout the nation. "I think the public education system is about as unaccountable as anything the human mind has conceived," says Joe Nathan, director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota. "What's happened in Buffalo and a number of other places is that the preferences of adults have become more important than the needs of children. Our school systems are fundamentally set up as employment agencies rather than educational institutions."

Buffalo City Comptroller Joel Giambra complains that there's no link between the high salaries being earned by school administrators and the performance of their students. The district usually evaluates new administrators before they're granted permanent status after three years on the job, but the evaluation criteria is fuzzy, and it's rare that anyone is turned down. A curriculum audit conducted in March 1997 by a team of national experts found a haphazard and incomplete evaluation process. Auditors randomly pulled the files of 40 administrators

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and found 24 had no evaluations. The grading system used on the remaining 16 was generous. Administrators were given the highest grade possible 87 percent of the time and unsatisfactory ratings were issued in less than 1 percent of the categories in which they were graded. "It's been 24 years since my last evaluation," one administrator told auditors. "There isn't an evaluation system after administrators become tenured," another said.

When James Harris came aboard as superintendant nearly three years ago, he inherited a management staff of about 220, including assistant superintendants, directors and supervisors who work out of the central office, and principals and assistant principals working in schools. He had the authority to replace only six of the 220: three associate superintendents, two special assistants focused on budget and media relations, and a labor negotiator. Removing any of the others would have required the district to prove incompetence or misconduct. Simply doing a mediocre job, or the emergence of someone better suited for the position, are not sufficient cause to remove or demote a school administrator in Buffalo.

Unions have such a stranglehold that Harris couldn't even hire his own confidential secretary. Union work rules dictate who he got and, unlike the situation in most workplaces, she is a union member and not considered confidential management. In contrast, the mayor not only can hire his own secretary, but also commissioners, deputy commissioners and a host of other managers. In all, the mayor has control over 42 management positions that are exempt from union representation.

Masiello describes the district's lack of management rights as "an obstacle." "Management needs to have the rights and flexibility to manage and hold people accountable," he said.

But the times are changing elsewhere. A growing number of states and school districts are holding principals and other school administrators more accountable by regularly evaluating their performance and in some cases eliminating tenure. While tenure for principals is embedded in New York state law, it is being challenged around the country. Massachusetts, Georgia, North Carolina and Oregon have stripped their principals of tenure in recent years, reducing to 16 the number of states that provide principals with tenure.

The Chicago school system, considered one of the nation's most troubled districts in the '80s, has been the most aggressive in holding administrators accountable. Linking job security to student performance has been a cornerstone of efforts to improve the district, says G. Alfred Hess, director of the Center for Urban School Policy at Northwestern University and an observer to the Chicago reform movement. "We saw principals' lifetime tenure as one of the major problems in getting school improvement to happen," he says. "The leadership was not accountable for the performance of the kids,"

"Our school systems are fundamentally set up as employment agencies rather than educational institutions."

The Illinois State Legislature enacted reforms in 1988 and 1995. Councils consisting primarily of parents have gained greater control over school budgets and can hire and fire principals. The mayor appoints the school board and hires the top five central office administrators. The teachers union's power has been reduced and principals lost their tenure altogether. As a result, ineffective teachers and administrators at poorly performing schools can be fired. "The difference is night and day," Hess says. "Previously, principals understood their main job was to make sure their school didn't get into the news, except for something wonderful. And as long as they kept their school out of trouble, nobody cared what happened. Nobody ever got fired because the kids didn't learn. Now the primary question about the performance of school officials is whether their kids are learning or not."

The reforms are paying off. The percentage of students reading at national norms climbed from 24 to 35 percent from 1990 to 1998. "I would say 85 percent of the credit for changes in student achievement relate to the ability to change the principal at the school," Hess says. "Effective principals make or break improving schools."

"If you want to improve student achievement, you have to tie job security to whether kids are learning more. Otherwise educators' prejudice about the ability of low-income and minority kids to learn gets in the way of change," Hess says. "If you can say, 'It's not my fault, it's the kids I have to teach,' you're not going to get much change in those schools. But if people say, 'Your job security depends on whether kids in your classes are learning,' then you have a whole different lever for change." ●

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Method Madness

Why are public school teachers so poorly trained?

By Carol Innerst

With a new semester just getting underway, Paula Kelberman's first order to her class of prospective elementary school teachers at East Stroudsberg University in Pennsylvania was to rearrange the tables in the classroom. They were lined up in rows. She wanted them in a "U" shape because rows are "boring" and too "traditional." Rows also apparently promote individualism, which would-be teachers learn is bad, rather than cooperation, which encourages students to talk and work together. "This is not a course that will tax you in terms of ... reading," the professor continued. "I'm not as interested in your grade as I am interested in your ability to explain your own process. The final product will not be as important as the effort, the process you put into it."

These techniques—stressing how rather than what to teach—are common in the 1,300 colleges and universities responsible for training our future teachers. Educators have complained for decades about the failure of teacher ed programs to offer teachers any substantial training in subject matter. But despite a spate of reports and recommendations and flurries of activity in the name of teacher education reform, little has changed in the way most teacher training institutions go about their business. Most still attract students of average or below average intellectual ability. Most still make it easy for students to get into teacher education programs, often after they have failed coursework in another discipline. And most still view their role, and the primary role of the teachers they train, as change agents whose mission is to work toward social justice and equity in the classroom rather than academic achievement. The 1993 mission statement of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education explains: "First and foremost, quality teacher education [programs] must be places of active conscience. The professional commitment to social justice, and the ethics of equity and diversity in the American culture must be palpable."

Social justice and equity are commendable goals for society, and no one could quarrel with the need for conscientious teachers who know how to create a harmonious classroom atmosphere. Moreover, some pedagogical training is clearly necessary, especially for teaching younger children (if you doubt it, try spending a day as a substitute third-grade teacher). But the foundation for learning is built in the elementary years and too often, the basics of teaching kids to read, write, and compute lose out to educational fads that focus on building self-esteem and discouraging competition.

For instance, in an effort to avoid competition and hierarchy, ed schools promote something called "cooperative learning"—putting students of varying abilities to work together on a project. Cooperative learning can be an excellent educational technique in some circumstances. But when used exclusively—as it often is—it enforces a lowest common denominator on the group and holds individuals back. Prospective teachers are subjected to large doses of cooperative learning as well, as professors model the desired teaching techniques. Other current teaching fads include "developmentally appropriate" learning, which posits that education is a natural unfolding that occurs at different times for different children and discourages teaching them to read and write before they are "ready." E.D. Hirsch, the education critic and author of *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, testified before Congress that "this doctrine is drummed into almost all teachers who take early-education courses. The intention is to ensure caring treatment of young children, yet the ultimate effect of

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the doctrine is to cause social harm. To withold demanding content from young children between preschool and third grade has an effect which is quite different from the one intended. It leaves advantaged children [who get knowledge at home] with boring pabulum, and it condemns disadvantaged children to a permanent educational handicap that grows worse over time."

To make matters worse, today's prospective teachers are often themselves the products of poor schooling and arrive on campus requiring remediation in math, writing, and sometimes reading. Consequently textbooks used in teachers colleges have been dumbed down to the point where a book used for a sophomore-level child psychology course, for example, "is written at what used to be a 10th or 11th grade high school reading level," according to John E. Stone, an education professor at East Tennessee State University.

Small wonder that 59 percent of newly-graduated Massachussetts teachers, steeped in methodology designed to make students feel good about themselves, failed a literacy exam given by the state last year.

Small wonder then that 59 percent of newly-graduated Massachusetts teachers, steeped in methodology designed to make students feel good about themselves but bereft of factual knowledge about any subject, failed a literacy exam given by the state last year. This was no isolated incident. The previous spring, Connetquot school district on Long Island in New York state got 758 applications in response to an advertisement to fill 35 teaching vacancies. District officials decided to narrow the pool by asking applicants to take a short version of a multiple choice reading comprehension test taken from the state's old 11th grade Regents English exams. Just 202 applicants correctly answered at least 40 of the 50 questions.

Not too long ago it was expected that a child would learn to read by the end of first grade. In recent years, that expectation has been pushed back to the end of third grade—and many children still fail to learn because their teachers were never properly taught how to teach them. The prevailing "whole language" philosophy of reading instruction sees learning to read as a natural process that will come in time when the child is developmentally ready to learn to read. A good example of the chasm between education professors and parents (and even many teachers) is the language war over the best way to teach reading—phonics or whole language. Most schools of education continue to train prospective teachers in whole language even though research shows that early, systematic phonics instruction is necessary for 30 to 40 percent of beginning readers. It takes a brave teacher to buck the belief system and whip out flash cards when she sees children struggling to read because they have not been taught to sound out the letters of the alphabet. California, which saw its reading scores plummet after years of whole language instruction, has ordered schools to teach phonics, but there is massive resistance to this change.

Parents complain, too, that their children reach middle school and can't multiply because teachers have been trained to emphasize "higher level thinking skills" rather the mundane memorization of the multiplication tables. Rote memorization is bad, teacher trainees are told. Learning any facts is useless, they hear, because information is constantly changing and increasing. It would be impossible to teach or absorb it all.

A 1997 Public Agenda survey documented a huge disparity between what parents want their children to be taught in school, and what professors of education want them to learn. Parents want orderly schools that emphasize the academic fundamentals. Education professors want less structured schooling that facilitates inquiry and stresses "learning how to learn." Despite evidence that disadvantaged children especially benefit from traditional "direct instruction" (the teacher has information and transmits it to the pupil), Public Agenda found that even for this group education professors continued to preach process and learner-centered teaching in which children "construct their own knowledge."

Raising the Bar

To become a public school teacher, college graduates have to be certified by the state. Prospective teachers must take required general education and education courses, do a stint at student teaching, and pass a series of general knowledge tests. The passing scores on these tests vary from state to state but tend to be low. As a result, a lot of unqualified teachers get into the classroom. In the early '80s a few states weed-

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ed out the illiterates by testing veteran teachers, but howls from the teachers unions soon nipped that practice in the bud. For their part, unions complained that too many teachers were assigned to classes in subjects they had not trained in. A math teacher, for example, might be asked to take over a physics class because of a shortage of physics teachers.

Prodded by public officials, states like Pennsylvania are attempting to address the problem of teacher quality in a variety of ways, including forcing changes in the way the teacher training schools do business. Governor Tom Ridge and Secretary of Education Eugene W. Hickok have launched reform initiatives to upgrade teacher training. The first thing they've done is make it harder to get into state schools of education by increasing the required minimum grade point average to a 2.5 or higher, depending on the specialty. They're also making it harder to get licensed as a teacher and are forcing schools to eliminate the watered-down content courses for teachers, replacing them with rigorous curricula that put the emphasis on subject mastery. There is considerable resentment among the deans and other high-level administrators, but privately some faculty members at the schools of education are cheering the efforts.

Pennsylvania's East Stroudsburg University, for example, raised the grade point average needed to get into elementary education from 2.5 to 2.75. Students still need to take 60 hours in general education, but no longer have a smorgasbord of courses to choose from. A would-be secondary math teacher now must take the same math course a math major takes, not an easier course designed especially for teachers.

Hickok, who gave up his tenure at Dickinson College to continue working on education reform during the final four years of the Ridge administration, remains disappointed that teaching is "still attracting too many students who really aren't of the intellectual calibre I'd like to see. On any college campus, the best and the brightest aren't going into education," he said. "That will take time." Some deans of schools of education agree. Dean Edwin J. Delattre of Boston University School of Education—one of the harshest critics of teacher training—says there are no more than 50 good teacher training institutions among the 1,300 in the country. Of the others, he says: "They admit and graduate students who have low levels of intellectual accomplishment. ... They are well-intentioned, decent, nice people who by and large don't know what they're doing."

Three years ago BU began to target only teacher applicants with high SAT scores. The inquiry pool immediately dropped 17 percent, but SAT scores of the freshman class topped 1200 that year—more than 300 points higher than the average self-declared education majors who took the 1996 SAT. BU also doubled the amount of time prospective teachers must spend in math class and made an ethics course mandatory.

Some schools, among them George Mason University's Graduate School of Education, are tying teacher training to professional development schools—public schools that bridge the chasm between the theorists at universities and the practitioners dealing with real children in real classrooms. These schools work closely with teacher training institutions and allow prospective teachers to use their classrooms for extensive field experience. The program uses the school's veteran teachers as mentors to the student teachers and also brings university professors out of their ivory tower and into a real classroom. New teachers say the extended practical experience is extremely beneficial. Dean Gary R. Galluzzo of George Mason is a strong advocate of professional development schools. He remembers going through teacher training and not seeing any students until his first day of student teaching. "I didn't see a teenager until my first day in that school in 1973," he said. "That's wrong."

Another way to improve the quality of teaching is through alternative certification programs. If properly designed and executed, such programs can open public classroom doors to people like Hickok, who has taught at the college level but is deemed unqualified to teach in a public K-12 school because he has not jumped through the hoops of ed-school methodology training. The nation's first true alternative certification program was pioneered by New Jersey in the '80s. The program, which attracted more minorities to teaching than the regular teacher college route, put college graduates with a bachelor's degree into K-12 classrooms where they worked with a mentor teacher while taking an abbreviated teacher training program evenings and weekends. Pennsylvania is about to launch a similar initiative that will let bachelor's degree holders teach under a mentor while taking one year of subject-based coursework to obtain a teaching certificate. The key is that the coursework will steep the teacher candidate in the subject he or she has been hired to teach, not just pedagogy.

This kind of alternative certification, which can bypass or at least lessen the impact of the faddish curricula of the teacher training institutions, could

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be a potent tool for forcing schools of education to become responsive to and provide the kind of no nonsense teachers that parents and the larger public want to see in K-12 classrooms.

School choice, which allows families to choose the public or private school they want their children to attend with state funding following the child, could also prod schools losing students to rethink their methodologies, putting pressure on the training institutions. In many districts, parents for years have signaled their desire for traditional or basic schools that put an emphasis on subject matter and are dedicated to achievement. The few public schools that feature structure and the basics find parents standing in line for days to try to get their child enrolled. Public charter schools can have the same kind of impact, particularly if their charters successfully free them from the regulatory red tape of hostile local school boards and teachers unions.

Another lever for change could come through the states, which accredit teacher training institutions and license teachers. If a school regularly graduates teachers who can't pass the state's certification test, states can shut that school down. States can also adopt value-added assessments to determine how well teachers are doing in the classroom. Pioneered in Tennessee, value-added assessment requires new teachers to demonstrate their ability to produce achievement in their students, not just pass performance-based exams that test their grasp of the current pedagogical orthodoxy learned in teacher training schools. At a minimum, value-added assessment requires annual testing of students in all grades with a reliable and valid achievement test.

Unfortunately, teacher training reform appears to be headed in the wrong direction. The 1996 report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future calls for all teacher training to be aligned with the teacher certification standards developed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The National Board's standards are consistent with the "latest research" that supports learner-center teaching and other fads already solidly in place in those institutions. The current push by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education to bring all teacher training under its auspices would similarly assure that social and attitudinal goals, not academic achievement, remain the priority of teachers. And that would add another nail to the coffin of teacher training reform. ●

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Styron's Chance

There have been promising innovations to help pay for college, but none match the GI Bill.

By Alexandra Starr

In Sophie's Choice, William Styron's 22-year-old alter-ego is summarily laid off from his job at a New York publishing house. But despite his near-penniless state, the young man is elated at the possibilities of the future. "I...had the freedom of the world spread out before me," he writes. Styron is not the only young man to have been gripped by excitement as he made his way in the world. But for the hundreds of thousands of graduates who leave school saddled with debt, their enthusiasms are tempered by the prospect of paying back more money than most have ever laid eyes on. Styron's blithe outlook was probably due in no small part to the fact that he attended Duke University on the GI Bill. Not only was his tuition paid for; he also received a $75 monthly allowance, which could go a long way in the 1940s.

Styron was just one of the 2.2 million veterans who attended college on the World War II scholarship. Many of them would never have set foot on a university campus without the federal grant, and their lives (not to mention American society) were turned upside down by Uncle Sam's investment. Armed with their B.A.s, these graduates entered careers in the sciences, arts, public policy, and business. They formed the bulwark of the growing American middle class. Styron is not the only illustrious graduate to have profited from government largesse: John Chancellor, former Justice Byron White, and Clint Eastwood were GI recipients, too. As Peter Drucker wrote in *Post-Capitalist Society*, "future historians may regard [the GI Bill] as the most important event of the 20th century."

Today, as the gap between the haves and have-nots in our society grows into a chasm, a college education is becoming more important than ever before. The GI Bill, however, was the last great investment the United States made in higher education. College aid has drifted from a grant-based program to a loan-based system. In the '70s two-thirds of all financing came in the form of grants; today, two-thirds comes in the form of loans. (If the significance of this trend is lost on you, consider the difference between being given a house and having someone loan you the money to buy one.) Meanwhile, university tuitions imploded: Between 1981 and 1995, the cost of attending even traditionally affordable public colleges shot up 234 percent, nearly three times as fast as median household income. College is increasingly beyond the reach of low-income students, and middle class families are finding their backs pushed against the wall as well.

There is, however, a silver lining in this storm cloud. While the federal government hasn't confronted the college cost crunch head on, legislation aimed at making higher education more affordable has sprung up at the national and state level. Funding for Pell Grants, which provide aid to the neediest families, inched up last year. In 1993 Georgia began dispensing scholarships to students who maintain a B average in high school. The Clinton administration revamped the student loan system, leading to improved service for kids. And the government is allowing students the option of paying back their loans as a percentage of their income, which should allow beneficiaries more flexibility in their career choices. Certainly, none of these innovations match the generous package Styron was entitled to as a former GI. But they lighten the load of newly-minted college graduates. And that gives these kids a chance to see the world the way Styron did: thrilled rather than cowed by the twists the future could take, eager to make their mark at a young age.

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Nickels from Uncle Sam

Beth Macy was befuddled by the letter she received from Bowling Green State University 17 years ago. Along with an acceptance notice was a list of strange names like "Pell Grant" and dollar sums that made the high school senior's eyes bulge. She thrust the sheet of paper under the nose of her guidance counselor and asked him what it meant. "It means," he replied, "that you can go to college." Macy was stunned. Her mother was supporting the family on $8,000 a year; college seemed little more than a pipe dream. "That letter could have read: 'Congratulations: You've entered the middle class,'" she says.

Macy's entree to a better life can be traced to an idea that came to former Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) as he skied down a mountain in Switzerland. The concept of financing college educations for poor Americans had been kicking around for several years, and Pell wanted to ensure that students with the greatest need received the most aid. He jotted down his solution on a placemat in the ski lodge, and a variation of his idea was passed into law in 1972: There would be a fixed grant for everyone, but the scholarship would be subtracted from an "expected family contribution" to be established annually. That way, indigent students would receive the largest grants, but lower-middle class families could tap into government funds as well.

Pell's blueprint was reportedly inspired by the success of the GI Bill. But his eponymous program is centered around a very different premise than the World War II veteran scholarship. The GI Bill was essentially a quid pro quo: Americans were paying for the college education of former soldiers in recognition of their service. In contrast, the Pell Grant was based on the idea that government had an obligation to improve the lives of the disadvantaged. (This was back in the days when the phrase "activist social policy" didn't send politicians running for cover.) In addition, the GI Bill covered veterans' college tuition and fees, whether they were attending Yale University or Queens College. The Pell Grant has always been capped and the program never fully funded.

While Pell Grants never became a foundation for college financing in the United States, the early track record of the program was promising. The real value of the Pell Grant was at its peak in the late '70s, and with state scholarships surging, many low-income Americans were able to finance their college educations without taking on a mountain of debt. From 1981 to 1994, however, the value of the federal grant dropped 22 percent. The Clinton administration did push the maximum award up to $3,000 last year. But only the poorest families will qualify for the full stipend.

Obviously, not only the destitute need help. With some private colleges charging a cool $30,000 annually, the Bradys and Cleavers are taking a deep gulp at the prospect of underwriting a pre-med degree. These households should not despair, however—the federal government may not be funding the higher education of middle America, but merit-based scholarships are all the rage in states across the country. Georgia, for example, parcels out thousands of grants to kids of all income levels with solid academic records. It's not the GI Bill, but the Peach state's program is probably the most generous public scholarship system operating in the United States today.

A Peach of a Deal

The HOPE (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally) scholarship could be summarized in a 15-second campaign jingle: Any Georgia resident who has completed high school with a "B" average can attend the state's public colleges tuition-free. The stipend also covers mandatory fees and provides a $300 annual book allowance. Georgia students attending private in-state universities receive a lump $3,000 scholarship, in addition to a $1,000 "Georgia Tuition Equalization Grant" that has been on the books since 1973. Students have to keep up their academic record in college to remain eligible for funding.

Since its inauguration in 1993, the HOPE scholarship has helped finance the education of roughly 371,000 students. It's credited with pushing up African-American enrollment at public universities by five percent. And by making college a plausible scenario for low-income students, these kids seem to be taking to the books in high school with renewed purpose. "For your students who might not otherwise have gone to college, it helps keep them focused," a Georgia high school guidance counselor told the *Augusta Chronicle*. It's not the first time students who have caught a glimpse of a brighter future begin buckling down to make it a reality. In 1981, Eugene Lang told a sixth grade Harlem class that he would pay for their college education if they graduated from high school. A subsequent "60 Minutes" segment pointed out that while two out of every three blacks and Hispanics in New York drop out of high school, nine out of 10 of Lang's kids made it to graduation.

But Lang's efforts differed from Georgia's program in a revealing way: While the millionaire New Yorker targeted students who were in true need of

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help, Georgia's program isn't designed to serve the most disadvantaged. There is no income cap on who can receive the HOPE scholarship, so a millionaire heiress attending Emory University could have $4,000 knocked off her tuition. At the same time, students who qualify for outside grants (e.g., the poor) have their funding subtracted from the HOPE stipend, so a student who obtains a full Pell Grant wouldn't receive any money at all from Georgia's coffers.

It would only take some slight tweaking to ensure the neediest Georgia students receive the most aid. A good place to start would be reimposing the $66,000 income cap on family eligibility that was originally part of the program. (Or, better yet, require higher income kids to perform community service for their stipend.) The state should also permit students receiving need-based aid grants to qualify for a full HOPE scholarship. Outside stipends may cover most of these kids' tuition expenses, but HOPE could defray room and board fees, which can be hefty.

Former Georgia Gov. Zell Miller says HOPE will be the cornerstone of his legacy, and he does not tire of detailing the accomplishments of the program. There is one fact in particular he and the program's flaks seem at pains to get across: The scholarship is paid for by the Georgia lottery. "This program comes at no cost to taxpayers," says Steve Tompkins, HOPE's director of communications. (Perhaps a more accurate way to put it is that the scholarship is underwritten by lottery-playing taxpayers, who are disproportionately disadvantaged.) The subtext isn't hard to make out—HOPE's popularity rests in no small part on its "free lunch" credentials.

Despite the flaws in the Georgia program, Miller deserves credit for making large-scale scholarships part of the higher education landscape again. Georgia isn't generally known for being ahead of the curve on public policy issues, but states like Maryland, Texas, and Washington are now introducing merit grant programs of their own. The federal government, meanwhile, is sticking to loans. That's not good news for university-bound kids. Today, about half of all students go into hock to finance their education. As they can attest, there's a big difference between attending school tuition-free and amassing debt that could have paid for a modest house in their parents' day.

The Loan Game

The student loan program came into being with the Higher Education Act of 1965. Until then, banks had balked at lending money to 18-year-olds with no credit history or collateral. To entice the banks, the Higher Ed bill threw some treats their way, offering to guarantee student loans and kicking in subsidies to boot. It turned out to be a sweet deal for the commercial interests: Student loans proved very profitable, and virtually risk-free. If a student defaulted on his loan, after all, Uncle Sam would pick up the tab. Needless to say, lenders didn't feel much pressure to clamp down on delinquent debtors, and the default rate reached a whopping 22.4 percent in 1990.

Clinton surveyed the wreckage of the loan system when he assumed office and decided to turn the old program on its head. Instead of funneling loans through heavily subsidized banking entities, the government itself would provide funds directly to students through their colleges. After a bitter battle with the banks, the so-called "direct lending" program was voted into law in 1993. The legislation allowed the government to take over only five percent of loans in the first year, with the possibility of monopolizing the system over the long haul. The Republican-controlled Congress slowed the transition, however, and today the government controls only one-third of the student loan volume.

Actually, it's probably a good thing Uncle Sam didn't take over the student loan program entirely: Competition between the government and private lenders in the student loan market has proven a boon to students. The banks cleaned up their act when they were no longer the only player in town. And some school administrators cannot say enough good things about direct lending—they describe the government's program the way a born-again Christian would relay the story of Jesus driving the money-lenders out of the temple. But even these advocates allow it's preferable for banks to maintain a presence in the loan market. "The way the system works now, students and schools are in the driver's seat," says one administrator. Kids can take advantage of new repayment options and lower rates, but it's also harder for them to wiggle out of their obligations. That's translated into savings for taxpayers: In 1996, the student default rate fell to 9.4 percent, its lowest level ever.

But there is more than a sliver of irony in all of this cheery news. A major reason Clinton pushed hard for direct lending was because he wanted to provide students with the option of paying back their debt as a percentage of their income. In other words, they pay what they can afford. Income-contingent loans are scarcely a liberal concept—it was first introduced by Milton Freedman in a 1955 essay—but Clinton saw it as a method of promoting the greater social good. If students didn't have to retire their loans in

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enormous installments, the theory went, they might gravitate toward low-paying but socially important jobs like teaching or social work. It could give graduates license to pursue their dreams—middle-aged entrepreneurs could open the widget factory they'd always fantasized about; recent graduates could attempt the Great American Novel. Income-contingent loans, in other words, could free graduates of all ages to assume career risks without risking default.

You would think kids would be tripping over themselves to take advantage of the income-contingent option. But less than one percent of new student borrowers in the direct loan program use the pay-as-you-can alternative. This is partially because banks have tried to undercut pay-as-you-can loans, which they fear might give the government-run program a competitive edge. But the administration has also done a poor job in marketing the income-contingent scheme. "If more students knew about it, more students would join up," says a former education department employee. "The department has just been gun-shy because it doesn't want to rankle any feathers with the Republicans who oppose direct lending."

It's too bad the administration has allowed itself to be intimidated, because the pay-as-you-can option can help students to break into rewarding, if not necessarily renumerative, careers. Take the example of a young man we'll call Tom. After attending law school, Tom was tens of thousands of dollars in hock. While he had spent a few summers as an associate in a corporate law firm, he was adamant about finding work in the non-profit sector. "There was no way I was going to the other side," he says. So the self-described tree-hugger signed up for a $25,000-a-year-position with an environmentalist group. His loans, however, were eating up almost half of his income. "I finally had to move out of my apartment and stay with friends in order to make the payments," he recounts.

Tom ultimately consolidated his loans under direct lending, and he is paying off his debt through the income-contingent option. His situation is still precarious—as he points out, pay-as-you-go doesn't mean you get out of settling your debt, and his income is low enough that any outlay of cash doesn't go unnoticed. But as Tom puts it, he's been saved from joining the dark side. "The payments are so huge under the traditional loan system that people aren't going to enter the non-profit sector," he warns. "In order to deal with their loans they'll take corporate jobs."

In my experience, Tom's pronouncement has proven all too correct. Over the last few years I've seen lots of students trade in their Birkenstocks for high heels and wingtips. It's possible many of these kids would have joined the ranks of corporate America even if they were free of student loans. My friend Angela, however, was different. A former VISTA volunteer, she was set on a career as a district attorney. When I checked up with her last year, however, she said student debt had driven her into the arms of a corporate law firm. "I never thought I would do this, but here I am," Angela said over the phone.

With some private colleges charging a cool $30,000 annually, the Bradys and Cleavers are taking a deep gulp at the prospect of underwriting a pre-med degree.

We ended up discussing my graduation present to her—a copy of Styron's *Sophie's Choice*. I had given the book to a couple of friends because it seemed to capture the nervous expectation of post-college life. But as it turns out, Styron's elegant musings on the possibility of youth are alien to many graduates today. While Pell grants, the HOPE scholarship, and income-contingent loans all mitigate the cost of higher education, they only reach a small fraction of the students who can't pay for college without help. Student loans cast a pall over these kids' lives, and many are forced to shelve their dreams before they have a shot at making them a reality. "What do you do?" Angela surmised as we compared her situation to Styron's alter-ego of 50 years ago. "Things were just very different back then." ●

Research assistance provided by Brooke Foster and Megan Twohey

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A revealing episode in George Stephanopoulos' White House memoir All Too Human *confirms what many of us have long suspected: Hillary Clinton made the fatal decision to stonewall on Whitewater in 1993. Here's the story of that crucial moment, one that was to become what Winston Churchill calls "a hinge of fate." By refusing to divulge the relatively trivial sins of the Whitewater land deal, she fed rumors of a major political scandal, and triggered the appointment of an independent counsel—the beginning of a long scavenger hunt that led to impeachment. It didn't have to be that way. As Lanny Davis explains in the article that follows this one, the best policy with bad news at the White house is to get it out in a way that minimizes the damage.*

Hillary's Big Mistake

The decision that spawned impeachment

BY GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS

THE HOOFBEATS WERE CLOSING IN. This time they came from the Ozark home of the busted land deal that began when I was a senior in high school and Bill Clinton was attorney general of Arkansas. Whitewater. After an early 1992 flurry precipitated by a *New York Times* investigation, the issue had faded when our campaign commissioned an audit that documented how much money the Clintons had lost on the investment. The republicans couldn't effectively exploit the issue because President Bush's son Neil Bush had come under fire for his own involvement with a failed savings and loan. But late in 1993, the Resolution Trust Corporation (the government agency established to manage the aftermath of the 1980s S&L crisis) asked the Justice Department to open a criminal investigation of Madison Guaranty, the S&L managed by Jim McDougal, the Clintons' Whitewater partner. David Hale, a former judge and business associate of McDougal's who was trying to worm his way out of a fraud indictment, offered prosecutors and the press a new hook by alleging that Governor Clinton had pressured him to lend McDougal money.

These new developments, coupled with the miasma of mystery surrounding Vince Foster's suicide, piqued the interest of the *Times* and *The Washington Post*. They asked again to review all the Whitewater documents, and a series of faxed questions from the *Post* sat in the White House for weeks without a formal response. Busy with NAFTA, Somalia, and the crush of other business, I didn't attend the few October and November meetings on the matter. To me Whitewater was old news, the obsession of a few conspiracy theorists. But by early December, the *Post* was convinced we were hiding something sinister. Executive editor Leonard Downie made a series of extraordinary personal requests for the documents, and Ann Devroy warned me that the paper would go on the warpath unless we answered their questions and released the documents.

I wish we had. If a genie offered me the chance to turn back time and undo a single decision from my White House tenure, I'd head straight to the Oval Office dining room on Saturday morning, Dec. 11, 1993. The night before, Bernie Nussbaum, David Kendall (Clinton's private attorney), and Hillary had persuaded the president to stonewall the *Post*. All three were tough trial attorneys who were determined to follow a close-hold strategy more appropriate for corporate litigation than presidential politics. The possibility that the Clintons would be implicated in wrongdoing by any investigation of Madison Guaranty was extremely low, but the lawyers were taking nothing for granted. Hillary also feared that the *Post* inquiry was an invasive fishing expedition that would

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only create more inquiries. They all underestimated, however, the media reality that reporters want most what they're told they can't have, the political reality that a president's right to privacy is limited by the public's right to know, and the cultural reality that the country probably wouldn't care about the ins and outs of an old land deal as long as it didn't look as if the Clintons had something to hide.

On Saturday morning, just after the radio address, Mack gave Gergen and me one last chance to convince Clinton the only way to kill the story was to cooperate with the *Post.*

The president was sitting at the head of his small oval table, sipping a mug of decaf, with a pile of folders in front of him. Gergen and I were on either side. For once, though, the two of us were arguing the same case. Although we often clashed on policy matters, we both insisted now that turning over the Whitewater documents was the only way to manage the story. The president seemed to agree. "I don't have a big problem with giving them what we have," he said, almost apologetically, his mind elsewhere (that weekend, he was preparing to replace Secretary of Defense Aspin). "But Hillary ..."

Saying her name flipped a switch in his head. Suddenly, his eyes lit up, and two years' worth of venom spewed out of his mouth. You could usually tell when Clinton was making Hillary's argument: Even if he was yelling, his voice had a flat quality, as if he were a high school debater speeding through a series of memorized facts. The anti-press script was familiar to me by now. "No, you're wrong," he said. "The questions *won't* stop. At the Sperling breakfast, I answered more questions about my private life than any candidate *ever*, and what did *that* get me? They'll *always* want more. *No* president has ever been treated like I've been treated."

Gergen did his best to calm Clinton down. Having worked for Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, he'd seen what happens when a president is accused of covering up. He also tried to make the case that the *Post* would treat Clinton fairly. "Mr. President," he replied, "in 25 years, I've never seen better first-year coverage of a president." Gergen was doing exactly what he'd been hired to do—serving as a kind of emissary from the Washington establishment to the outsider from Arkansas. Still battle scarred from the campaign scandals and the snafus of our first six months, I tried a different tack, hoping to convince Clinton by invoking our shared experience. "Mr. President, you're right," I said. "You *have* gotten a raw deal from the press, and the stories they write *will* be unpleasant. But they can't really hurt you because they're all about the past, and you didn't do anything wrong. If we don't give them what they want, they'll say we're covering up. The pressure will build, and we'll end up answering the questions later anyway. Better to flush it out over the holidays when no one's paying attention."

For a moment, I thought our rare double-team effort had worked. Clinton didn't make a counterargument; the pol in him knew we were right. If only we'd dialed Downie right then and handed the phone to Clinton. But even that might not have worked. On this issue, Clinton wasn't commander in chief, just a husband beholden to his wife. Hillary was always the first to defend him on bimbo eruptions; now he had to do the same for her. Gergen and I didn't know what was in the Whitewater documents, but whatever it was, Hillary didn't want it out—and she had a veto. The president ended the meeting by saying he wanted to think about it some more. Later that afternoon, Mack called Gergen to tell him we were standing firm.

Needless to say, Hillary's strategy failed. Over the next week, successive stories began to suggest that the White House was orchestrating a cover-up. *Newsweek*, Dec. 15 '93: "The White House strategy last week appeared to be to try to contain the story by treating it with contempt." *The Washington Post*, Dec. 19 '93: "But the full financial history of Whitewater may never be known. White House officials have declined over the past several weeks to answer detailed questions about Whitewater's finances." *The New York Times*, Dec. 20 '93: "Based on what's publicly known, there's probably not a crippling scandal here. But the White House is behaving as if there were." *Exactly right.*

A few days before Christmas, the controversy approached critical mass. Then two successive disclosures triggered an explosion. First, *The American Spectator* and *The Los Angeles Times* reported that as governor of Arkansas, Clinton had used state troopers to procure women, and that he had recently called some of those troopers in an attempt, the articles suggested, to offer them federal jobs in return for their silence. When I asked Clinton about the rumors a few days before the story broke, his abrupt shift to fast-talking, lawyerly, hyperexplanation mode convinced me something was up. "I never offered anyone a job," he insisted. But he didn't deny calling the troopers (and as I soon learned, he had discussed the subject with at least one of them), which gave me a sickening sense of déja vu. I was back in Little Rock, hearing Clinton's voice on the Gennifer tapes. How

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could he be so reckless? He's so sure he can talk his way out of anything that he doesn't even think about the consequences. What if they have a tape? Why can't he just leave these things alone? A few stupid presidential phone calls now threatened to transform an old Arkansas story into an Oval Office scandal.

The press was still queasy about sex stories, however—especially with Hillary defending her husband surrounded by mistletoe and holly. But when the *Washington Times* reported that in the hours following Vince Foster's suicide a Whitewater file had been removed from Foster's office and given to the Clintons' private attorney instead of the investigators, the repressed energy stirred up by the trooper story was sublimated straight into the "Whitewater cover-up." Republicans jumped on the revelation and began to agitate for an independent investigation, and the editorial pages escalated calls for public release of the potentially incriminating files. Backpedaling, we agreed on Dec. 23 to hand over what we had to the Justice Department but not the press, which only raised more suspicions. The drumbeat for full disclosure continued through Christmas.

If a genie offered me the chance to turn back time and undo a single decision from my White House tenure, I'd head straight back to the Oval Office dining room on Saturday morning, Dec. 11, 1993.

On the first Sunday of the new year, I appeared on "This Week with David Brinkley", and the first question Sam Donaldson asked me was, Would the White House oppose an independent counsel to look into the Whitewater Land Development Corporation affair?

Mr. Stephanopoulos: "This is being investigated by the Justice Department. The president has turned over all the documents to the Justice Department. It was exhaustively looked into during last year's campaign. The president was part of a real estate deal many years ago where he lost a lot of money. Those are the facts. No laws were broken. The Justice Department investigation will show that, but there's no need at this time for an independent counsel."

Four follow-up questions later, George Will finally changed the subject, but by the next day both Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole had publicly called for the appointment of a special prosecutor, and the White House press corps was pressing Clinton for his response. A mistake I had made on "Brinkley" made matters worse. When I said that we had turned over the Whitewater documents to the Justice Department, I thought I was telling the truth. I assumed it was true because we had previously pledged to turn over the files between Christmas and New Year's. But as Felix Unger used to say on "The Odd Couple", "When you assume, you make an ass of you and me."

We hadn't delivered the files yet, because the lawyers were still cataloging them. Dee Dee had to spend the morning cleaning up my mess. Harold Ickes, who had just joined the White House staff to work on health care, was tasked instead with managing damage control on Whitewater.

All day Tuesday, we held a rolling Whitewater meeting in Mack's office. Although I had delivered the party line against a special prosecutor on "Brinkley", inside I was arguing that we had to request a special counsel before it was forced on us. Ever since Watergate, whenever a president or other high-level government official was accused of wrongdoing, an outside counsel had been appointed. (In Jan. 1994, the independent counsel law had expired. So we were arguing for the attorney general to use her authority to appoint a special counsel as was done under President Carter when questions were raised about his peanut warehouse business.) After the first couple of hours, we reached consensus; only Nussbaum was holding out. Joel Klein, his deputy, was dispatched to broach the matter with Hillary, but she shut him down. Two hours later, Harold and Mack tried again. The answer was still no.

When they returned with the news, about a dozen of us were scattered around Mack's office. Some sat at the conference table in the far corner, some by the fireplace; I was folded over the wingback chair by Mack's desk, facing the door, griping openly about the magnitude of our mistake. Then she walked in. The whole room dropped dead silent.

"Well," said Hillary crisply, taking a seat on the couch by the door. "I think this is a meeting I ought to be at."

Because I had been talking, I felt as if everyone was looking at me. The old "Life" cereal commercial passed through my head: Two older boys don't like the

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looks of their new breakfast, so they pawn it off on their little brother—"Let Mikey try it. He'll try anything." I prided myself on not being afraid to make a tough argument to the principals, and I'd look like a wimp now if I didn't continue.

"Well, I might as well go on with what I was saying," I said. Sitting up straight and staring right at Hillary, I made my case: "Assuming we did nothing wrong, the best thing is to have a special counsel say so. There's an air of inevitability to this. If we don't ask for one from the attorney general, we're going to get an independent prosecutor. Congress will keep the drumbeat going; they'll pass the Independent Counsel Act, and the Appeals Court will appoint one. I know we didn't do anything wrong, but it looks like we did because we're not being forthcoming. More important than anything else, this is going to kill health care if we don't get it under control. This debate will sap us for the next 30, 60, 90 days—as long as we keep up the fight. If you want us to fight, Hillary, we will. We can beat this back. But it will take all our time, all our staff resources, and, most important, all our political capital, which we need every bit of to pass health care."

I thought the final argument was the coup de grace—the killer point that she couldn't counter. Instead it struck at her deepest fear—that after all of her hard work, after all of her sacrifice, after all the indignities of the campaign and the frustrations of the first year, the project that would make it all worthwhile would be crippled by scandal. Cornered, she struck back: "What do you mean, the Congress won't stop? You told me that if we gave everything to the Justice Department that would *end* it. It *didn't* end it. Now the Congress wants them? If we were as tough as the Republicans, we'd band together and beat them back."

I tried to stay calm, answering point by point.

"The Democrats are still holding firm." (Republican Senators Alfonse D'Amato and Bob Dole had demanded Whitewater hearings, but Democrat Banking Committee chairman Don Riegle was holding them off.) "But I can't promise that they'll be with us in a month. It's beyond the Congress now: It's in the editorial pages; it's everywhere. We don't get the benefit of the doubt because we're not being forthcoming, and we *are* being defensive."

Whatever I said was exactly wrong. Tears strung the corners of her eyes, and I imagined Hillary's fear-induced fury—at the republicans for trying to destroy health care by destroying her, at the press for its small-minded, obsessive scrupulousness when issues affecting real people were at stake, at her husband for getting her into this stupid land deal with his shady friends in the first place and then expecting her to clean it up, at her best friend, Vince, for killing himself, at herself for letting the situation spiral out of control. All of that fury, for a moment, was directed at me.

"You *never* believed in us. In New Hampshire, it was just me and Susan [Thomases] and Harold [Ickes] who believed in us. If we wouldn't have fought, we would never have won. *You* gave up on us ..."

She paused, her voice fell, and Hillary started to cry. "We were out there alone, and I'm feeling very lonely right now. Nobody is fighting for *me*."

We all seemed stuck to our chairs, not knowing whether to be unnerved, afraid, or consoling. I was too stunned to respond. Harold, who had been explicitly absolved from the accusation of disloyalty, tried to rescue me with one final plea for reconsideration.

"I don't want to hear anything more," Hillary snapped, back in control. "I want us to fight. I want a campaign now." Looking back at me, she took one last shot: "If you don't believe in us, you should *just leave*." Then she walked out the door.

A dead moment passed. I fixed a crinkly smile on my face. Once I was sure Hillary was long gone, I rose to leave. "Nice try," Dee Dee whispered. I walked the few steps to my office, closed the door behind me, and broke down. ●

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Scandal Management 101

How to get the bad news out quickly—and quietly

BY LANNY J. DAVIS

THERE WERE TWO MAJOR TECHNIQUES that we used to implement McCurry's strategy of getting all the bad news out early and helping reporters write bad stories.

The first was overt and fully approved within the White House chain of command, at least in the first few months of 1997: Documents would be released to the press at the same time as they were handed over to the Congress. Over time the press came to call these episodes "document dumps." The second method was covert, both to the outside world and within the "official" channels of the White House—the selective placement of certain stories and hot documents with a particular news organization, on "deep background," in a manner designed to minimize damage.

The trumping argument used by McCurry and me for doing these document dumps was directly out of the rules: that the hot documents were going to be leaked anyway, or worse, they would *not* be leaked and would be released for the first time during nationally televised senate and house campaign-finance hearings. Better that we put the story out ourselves, with plenty of opportunity to answer questions and to characterize the documents favorably, or at least accurately.

We first used this technique in late Jan. 1997 when we released, all at once, thousands of pages of documents from the political files of former Deputy Chief of Staff Harold M. Ickes, who had served as the President's de facto campaign manager during the 1996 reelection campaign. And when we made these and subsequent "dumps" of large volumes of documents and materials all at once, we also decided, contrary to conventional wisdom and recent White House practices, to make it easy, not hard, for the reporters to write their story. We made multiple copies, gave them plenty of time to review them before deadlines, and stayed nearby to answer all their questions and give them on-the-record comments whenever possible. We did this not to be nice guys to the press, but in our own self-interest. By making it easier, we would maximize the chance that the stories would be written comprehensively, accurately, with our viewpoint expressed.

In addition to the document dumps, our second device for getting bad stories written early and accurately was the so-called "deep-background private placement." This device had to be used covertly, hidden not only from the outside world but even within the official White House chain of command, since there were at times reasons why, as a matter of policy, the White House would not release a document —for example, if it had not yet been turned over to a congressional investigating committee that had requested it and there was a concern that Republican committee chairs would be offended by the premature leak. We did this rarely; this method was almost always limited to a potentially very damaging story that was complicated, and therefore, which needed a baseline or "predicate" story to frame the issue. I never did a deep-background private placement without at least someone at a high level of the White House chain of command at least generally aware of what I was doing.

The advantages of the predicate story as a critical tool of damage control cannot be overstated. For damaging stories that have complicated facts, particularly ones mixing facts and legal issues, as was almost always the case in the campaign-finance stories for which I was responsible, the predicate story is simply mandatory. The predicate story ideally must be comprehensive and contain all the facts, good and bad. As such, it will become the foundation block

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for all other reporters and for all future reporting. It will pop up in every Lexis/Nexis database search from then on. If it is complete and accurate, it will likely kill or at least diminish follow-up stories, since there won't be much more to report. If it is incomplete and wrong, then the Lexis database will cause it to repeat and grow, like a virus, more and more difficult to catch up with, correct, and cure.

By its very nature, a predicate story takes time to investigate and time to write, and thus does not lend itself to the competitive pressures and imminent deadlines that are inevitable when there is a general release to all news organizations. That is why it is necessary to select a single reporter or news organization to help generate such a story. This offers the luxury of being able to take as much time as necessary to work with the reporter, give him or her all the facts and documents, get all the questions answered, and engage in an ongoing back-and-forth dialogue to sort out the facts and legal issues accurately. Finally, this procedure offers us the maximum chance to get into the story our interpretation or characterization of the facts most favorable (or least damaging) to the President.

Better that we put the story out ourselves, with plenty of opportunity to answer questions and characterize the documents favorably, or at least accurately.

Of course the main disadvantage of the deep-background private placement is that it pisses off the other reporters who are not the recipients of the exclusive. Under McCurry's guidance, when possible, I tried to rotate these placements so that all felt they were being treated equally. However, in certain instances, when we were trying to kill the impact of the story, we used certain news organizations for this purpose. And we chose certain time periods or days of the week to place these stories with the same purpose in mind. Usually our first choice was the Associated Press. Not only was the AP's team of investigative reporters first-rate and notoriously fact-oriented and fair, but we found that when an AP story went out on the overnight wires, the major daily national newspapers, such as *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*, would not be inclined to give it front-page play. If they printed it at all, it was often buried on an inside page. More importantly, if an AP story was comprehensive and accurate—meaning, an effective predicate story—it was less likely that the major dailies would have much left to report in the next day's papers.

Two other news organizations of choice for placement of deep background predicate stories were *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Los Angeles Times*. It might seem odd that the *WSJ* was one of our favorites, given the ideological hostility towards Clinton and his administration regularly reflected on its editorial page. But the *WSJ* had some of the best reporters in the city—led by Glenn Simpson and Phil Kuntz—covering these scandal stories. And the *WSJ* almost never put current political news on the front page; it usually got placed on the back page of the front section, which often diminished the impact of the story. We liked the *Los Angeles Times* for similar reasons. The *LA Times* also had three reporters who were very highly regarded for their fairness and balanced reporting: Alan Miller, Glenn Bunting, and David Willman. And for reasons that again seemed to us based more on institutional pride than anything else, the major national daily newspapers resisted repeating stories broken by an "out-of-town" newspaper such as the *Los Angeles Times*.

A good example of such a private placement is the way we handled documents suggesting that President Clinton made fundraising calls from the White House residence. It appeared, according to the call sheets and surrounding information we had about those calls, that the President's purposes and words during the phone calls had been ambiguous. He had not clearly asked for their "support." The fact that in some cases donations had followed the call clearly implied that the President would be suspected of having solicited campaign contributions. The call sheets suggested, but did not definitively prove, that the President's phone calls took place on phones in the White House residence. If so, this would have made them legal even if they were political solicitations on federal property.

The call sheets had been uncovered in May or early June 1997 and would have to be turned over to congressional committees. Clearly, this would make a very big story—one that, if not reported accurately and comprehensively, could damage the President

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and perhaps even lead to the appointment of an independent counsel.

So we decided to call John Solomon at the AP and invited him to come over to the White House to look over the call sheets and to answer any other questions he might have. We had come to regard Solomon as the most factually-oriented, middle-of-the-road journalist of any on the scandal beat. He would kill us with stories, for sure; but they were always factual and he went the extra mile to be fair and complete in his reporting. Several members of the White House counsel's office, were present to help me walk Solomon through all the documents, explain the underlying laws and rulings, and respond to his questions. One other tactical decision needs mentioning: We called Solomon on Thursday, July 3—so that the story would go out over the wires just in time for the Friday, July 4 newspapers.

Solomon wrote the story as comprehensively and completely as we had hoped—and included comments from me that the calls would have been legal even if there had been a direct solicitation. By the time the Fourth of July's fireworks and picnics and celebrations were completed, we hoped, there would be little interest among journalists—and less among non-journalists—in whether the President had made

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

Oops. We were dead wrong when we reported last month that **Juanita Broderick** had written **Bill Clinton** "I admire you very much." It was he who had written those words to her, a fact that alters the significance more than a little bit.

Thomas Ewing, a congressman from Illinois, may turn out to be new Speaker **Dennis Hastert**'s closest confidant. Certainly he's the closest in physical location, having been assigned an office within the Speaker's own suite. **John Feehery**, a Hastert spokesman, says that he does not know of another case where a speaker has shared quarters with another member.

Michael Isikoff is said to have been unhappy with the way he was treated when he worked at *The Washington Post*. If so, his new book *Uncovering Clinton* certainly settles some scores. He describes **Robert Kaiser**, the *Post* colleague who expressed the greatest disdain for his **Paula Jones** scoop, as "a pompous snob." And he carefully points out that the *Post*'s **Susan Schmidt** and **Peter Baker** got it wrong when they reported that "**Lewinsky** described **Clinton** and [**Vernon**] **Jordan** directing her to testify falsely in the Paula Jones sexual harassment case."

Federico J. Peña did not appreciate the White House's attempt to blame him in the Energy Department's slow response to Chinese espionage. His friends are asking "Didn't **Bill Clinton** appoint him?"

Paula Jones got just $200,000 from the $850,000 settlement of her suit against **Bill Clinton**. You will not be surprised to learn that the rest went to lawyers. But you may not know that she would have received $440,000 if she had accepted the 1997 settlement offer made by Clinton's lawyers.

Advancing White House trips is a job often left to junior staff, especially when the destination is a Buffalo or an Indianapolis. But when the destination is glamorous, the assignment becomes a much-prized perk. Thus the advance team for **Hillary Clinton**'s recent jaunt to Marrakech included Deputy White House counsel **Cheryl Mills.**

California Congressman **James Rogan** was supposed to be in trouble with liberal Hollywood Democrats because of his ardent advocacy of impeachment. But it seems his equally ardent advocacy on behalf of the financial interests of the film industry counts for more with at least some movie moguls. According to *The Washington Post*'s **Juliet Eilperin**, the Motion Picture Association of America's President **Jack Valenti** sponsored a fundraising dinner in late March at the Hay-Adams Hotel attended by biggies from Disney, Universal, Paramount, Fox, and Warner Brothers.

When the editors of the *National Review* asked **Dick Morris** to review **George Stephanopoulos**' new

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a few ambiguous and completely legal phone calls. Maybe there might be a follow-up story in Saturday's or Sunday's papers, but since Solomon's story was so complete, there really wouldn't be much to report. By Monday, we hoped, the story would have died down almost completely. As it turned out, we were right. Manipulative and strategic in the choice and timing of the publication of this story? I guess. But though we were obligated to be honest with reporters, we were not required to be suicidal.

This is a perfect example of good spinning: the facts got out, in context, and we helped diminish the impact of the story not by deceiving but by ensuring a comprehensive and accurate treatment of those facts.

One delicious aspect of the deep-background private placement is the awkward position in which it puts rival news organizations, who might otherwise bitterly complain about not being the recipient of the placement. "Why did you give Solomon that story?" one reporter asked me the day after the Fourth of July. "It's not fair to favor the AP over the rest of us."

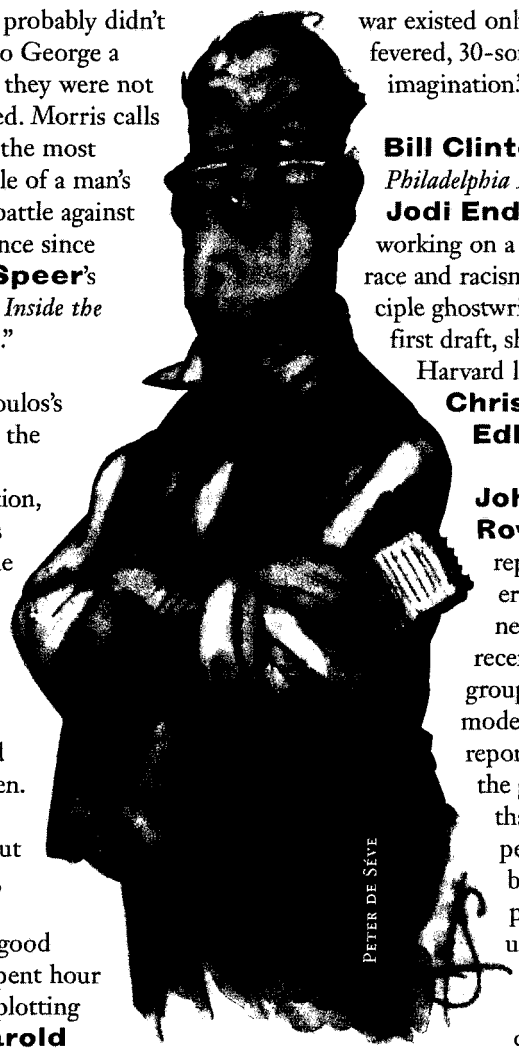
I waited, sensing what was coming next. I was not disappointed.

"You should have placed that story with me." ◎

---

book, they probably didn't intend to do George a favor. If so, they were not disappointed. Morris calls the book, "the most gripping tale of a man's successful battle against his conscience since **Albert Speer**'s cliffhanger *Inside the Third Reich*."

As for Stephanopoulos's standing in the **Clinton** administration, Morris says "by the time I came to the White House in late 1994, George had already fallen. He was out of power, out of the loop, out of the president's good graces...I spent hour after hour plotting against **Harold Ickes**. But of George I thought little. He was a spent force. Our titanic tug-of-war existed only in his fevered, 30-something imagination."


PETER DE SÉVE

Bill Clinton, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s **Jodi Enda** reports, is working on a book on race and racism. The principle ghostwriter for the first draft, she says, is Harvard law professor **Christopher Edley**.

John G. Rowland, the republican governor of Connecticut, recently told a group of GOP moderates: "I will report to you that the good news is that the rich people and the business people still like us. But that's about it. Unless they can vote four or five times each, we've got some problems in the next couple of campaigns."

George Tenet, the CIA's director, immersed himself in hot water with the White House when he leaked word to *The Washington Post* that he had opposed **Bill Clinton**'s strategy in Yugoslavia. The leak came just at that most embarrassing moment when the policy first appeared to be not working.

Matthew Miller, a columnist who works out of Los Angeles and knows something about the customs of movieland, says the stars have a solution to the kiss-and-tell memoirs that make Washington so nervous about what departing subordinates might say. He calls it a "political prenuptial." When an employee is hired, he or she would sign a contract of confidentiality pledging not to disclose anything until five years after their boss leaves office. "Hollywood celebrities have required such contracts forever from every cook, nanny and 'personal assistant' they hire."

That "bad back" that kept **Hillary Clinton** from accompanying her husband to Central America had, we are told, recovered enough for her to bounce around on a camel ride in Egypt.

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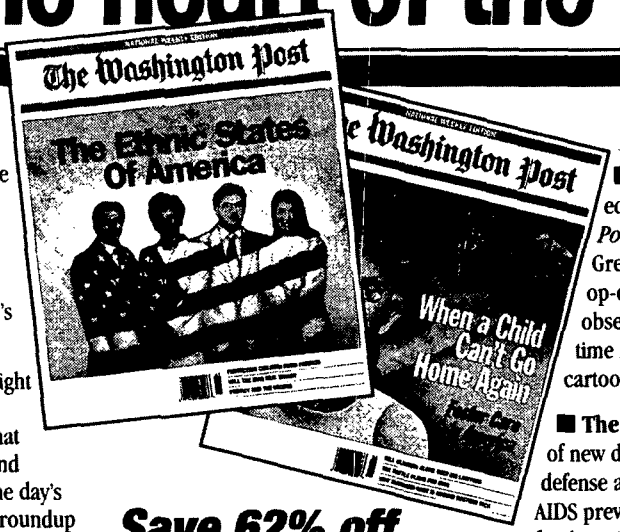

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Future Toxic

Why the environment will be the crucial issue of the 21st century

By Bill McKibben

THE INFORMATION AGE FEATURES A DEARTH of actual reporting—no one tells you what is actually going on in the world, as opposed to the endless commentary on what should or shouldn't be happening. I've read 6,000 guesses about how bad the Y2K bug will or won't be, for instance, but almost no reporters seem to have ventured out to Russian power stations or Nigerian oil fields to see what's actually being done. Every once in a while, someone cracks open a door and the real world blows in for a minute—*The New York Times* series on the Asian financial crisis last winter, for instance, which offered a sense of what it felt like to be an Indonesian gripped by the meltdown. And in so doing, of course, gave you some solid ground for guessing what might happen in the future.

EARTH ODYSSEY: Around the World in Search of Environmental Future
By Mark Hertsgaard
Broadway Books, $26

This shortage of actual data is nowhere more apparent than in the environmental field. Either the environment is going to be a crucial issue for the next century, or it is going to be The Crucial Issue for the next century. Either it will be one threat among many to our well-being, or it will be a threat to our existence. And the answers to a few questions would help us judge that more clearly.

For instance, how fast are the rain forests being cut down? If tropical deforestation is being brought under control, it would be at least a modest help in stabilizing climate change, and it would certainly slow the rate of species extinction. But since the late 1980s, when every news-gathering organization did a slew of stories from the jungles of Amazonia and Chico Mendes was a household name, it's been extremely difficult to get a clear picture. For some years, the Brazilians didn't bother to analyze the satellite data they had collected; rare are the stories that dig deep enough to tell you if attitudes on the South American frontier have changed, if laws are being enforced, if the country's economic crisis will speed or slow deforestation.

So the first thing to say about *Earth Odyssey*, Mark Hertsgaard's account of his trip "around the world in search of our environmental future," is that it provides answers to at least a few of the critical questions. In particular, Hertsgaard offers valuable and disturbing reporting from China that allows one to make certain guarded judgments about the future.

China, of course, lies near the heart of a dozen issues. The course of its economic development may determine our prosperity in the years to come; its approach to human rights may persuade other emerging nations to follow undemocratic paths; its military ambitions could destabilize its quadrant of the globe. But nowhere are its decisions more crucial than in the area of the environment, mostly because of its population size and the accident of its geology.

That accident—that China sits atop half the world's coal reserves—may well determine how high the planet's temperature rises. Should the Chinese decide to burn that coal in pursuit of modernity, they could double the atmosphere's concentration of carbon dioxide entirely by themselves. Every American could trade in his Ford Explorer for a mountain bike and we would still end up frying; indeed, some time in the next couple of decades, China will surpass the United States as the world's leading emitter of CO2 (though, of course, in per capita terms, we will reign as the unchallenged champs).

BILL MCKIBBEN's *book* The End of Nature *will be republished this year to mark its 10th anniversary.*

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Hertsgaard is able to show—albeit with reporting that is already several years dated—that while China has a series of progressive-sounding environmental regulations, they mean next to nothing against the reality of a nation bent on economic growth. He offers a macro-level analysis, interviewing Chinese leaders who publicly extol the steps they are taking to "halt environmental deterioration" by 2000 and then privately explain that they can't close factories for fear of triggering unrest and can't enforce pollution laws for fear of slowing the economic expansion needed to employ the ever-growing population.

The micro-level reporting is far more persuasive, however. Hertsgaard opens his book describing a tour of a paper factory that was officially closed but continued to operate, discharging incredible quantities of chlorine into the neighboring river. It was "a vast roaring torrent of white, easily 30 yards wide, splashing down the hillside from the rear of the factory like a waterfall of boiling milk ... decades of unhindered discharge had left the rocks coated with a creamlike residue, creating a perversely beautiful white-on-white effect."

Even more than the facts on the ground, the attitudes Hertsgaard encounters offer the best glimpses into China's future. He travels from city to city, attempting to gauge which one has the worst air of all. Is it Taiyuan, a coal center where particulate concentrations are 20 times worse than the maximum daily standard in the United States? Is it Xi'an, the ancient imperial capital, where "I timed how long I could stare at that artificially veiled sun without hurting my eyes. After 60 seconds, I stopped counting." Or is it Chongqing, where you can't see across a bridge at midday? But in each of these cities, and everywhere else he traveled, Hertsgaard found very few people who worried much about it.

"I am used to it," they told Hertsgaard over and over, explaining that their lungs had long since adapted to the poison (an assertion, needless to say, not borne out by the public health statistics). Once, quizzing a group of local people on a Shenyang street, he told them that a local doctor had urged him to be careful. "A man with a mustache patted my arm and said with a smile, 'This was good advice he gave you, because you do not come from around here. But we live here, and we are used to it.'"

The reason the Chinese are nonchalant about pollution is because there's something worse than bad air for them. In some ways, the heart of Hertsgaard's book is in his descriptions of the extreme poverty that still grips most of the nation. His interpreter, Zhenbing, had grown up in the '70s in a mud hut northwest of Beijing. He did not wear shoes until he was 14, and his family heated the house during icy winters by burning straw. One day he took Hertsgaard to see his housing at the university where he taught economics.

"It was on the third floor of a long, barnlike dormitory. From the moment we pushed through the scarred wooden doors on the building's ground floor, we were surrounded by the smell of toilets, stale air, and general uncleanliness ... Following Zhenbing up to the second floor, I saw that the only light came from dim, naked bulbs dangling from the ceiling at intervals of 50 feet or so ... His room was six paces wide and four paces long, yet it somehow contained two cast-iron bed frames, a metal bookcase, two wooden desks, a coat stand, and a set of rickety shelves ... The place felt shabby and grim and spirit-crushing, but Zhenbing pointed out that it was a relative privilege. As a junior faculty member he had this same space, while master's students were packed together, and undergraduates six to eight." And compared with the poverty he'd come from, Zhenbing said it was nothing short of sweet. "You must remember, the government is afraid of students getting upset, so they treat us relatively well. We have access to electricity, to running water, to central heating. Paradise!"

In these sections, Hertsgaard's reporting is worthy of Orwell at Wigan Pier. And if you're trying to guess China's willingness to enforce its own air pollution laws, much less its willingness to grapple with invisible problems like global warming, it's enough to go on. If anything, one wishes Hertsgaard's trip had been even longer, so he could have brought the news from more such places. We badly need to understand the situation in India and in the former Soviet Bloc, for instance, as well as in Latin America. Hertsgaard focuses a large chunk of his book on the Sudan and other parts of northern Africa, and while his reporting from that region is interesting, it doesn't carry the same sense of urgency; Africa is so economically pitiful at the end of the 20th century that while it can—and seemingly will—destroy most of its own ecology, it has relatively little effect on the globe as a whole.

Hertsgaard (whom I have met on several occasions, and whose book I blurbed before its publication) wraps a fair amount of analysis around his reporting. Most of it won't be new to people versed in the environmental debate—he is skeptical of corporate environmentalism, and puts much hope in the efficiency revolutions touted by researchers like Colorado's

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Amory Lovins. He ends with a call for a Global Green Deal, with government refocusing much of the economy toward environmental restoration. I think he is correct, and I also think his reporting makes clear just how unlikely such a scheme really is, at least until the attitudes he describes have begun to change.

Those attitudes, of course, are very nearly as strong in this country as they are in China. That's why we stand in desperate need of lots more reporting like this. ●

Eclipse of a Statesman

Why Dr. K's star has fallen

By Jacob Heilbrunn

ONE OF THE FEW HISTORICAL CONSTANTS is unexpected change. Consider the United States in the 1970s when gloom prevailed. America had been defeated in Vietnam. Richard Nixon had resigned. Stagflation—high unemployment coupled with even higher interest rates—made it appear that the economy was permanently weakened. So pervasive was the view of America's collapse that it stretched into the 1980s, reaching full flower in Yale professor Paul Kennedy's bestseller, *The Decline and Fall of the Great Powers*, which argued that because of imperial "overstretch" the United States was headed the way of the Habsburg, Spanish, and British empires—into the rubbish heap of history.

YEARS OF RENEWAL
By Henry Kissinger
Simon & Schuster, $35

Today, apart from the mess in the Balkans, the outlook could not be cheerier. Bill Clinton, having survived impeachment, is riding high in the polls. The 1978 Humphrey-Hawkins bill defined full employment at four percent unemployed; now unemployment hovers at three percent, while interest rates remain at historically low levels. And the real victim of imperial overstretch was, of course, the Soviet Union.

History, especially U.S. history, tends to move in boom-bust cycles, but one question anyone looking at the past few decades has to ask is, "How did American elites get it so wrong?" In any such survey, one of the main culprits has to be Henry Kissinger. Kissinger, as the third and final installment of his memoirs suggests, was the first declinist—a pessimist about America's political system, its social cohesion, and its role in the world. A self-proclaimed realist, the one country Kissinger does not seem to have been very realistic about is the United States.

The mischief rests in Kissinger's embrace of realism. At a moment when the Clinton administration is being bludgeoned for pursuing a haphazard and reactive foreign policy, Kissinger's *Years of Renewal* offers a useful reminder of what can happen when a procrustean academic theory of politics is rigidly imposed on the messy, recalcitrant world abroad. Though seen as a Harvard liberal in the '60s, Kissinger easily jumped ship from the Rockefeller campaign to join the Nixon administration in 1968 as national security adviser. And the main thing he carried in his toolkit, fresh from the Harvard seminar room, was the doctrine of realism.

What did Kissinger understand by realism? Realism counsels that the world is a Hobbesian one, filled with warring states in which human rights considerations are a pesky, if not frivolous, annoyance. Stability is the highest goal; a balance of power the best possible outcome. Kissinger and Nixon attempted to create such an environment with what they called triangular diplomacy—a three-power world in which the Soviet Union, China, and the United States checked each other. Essentially, Kissinger saw himself as maintaining the status quo, and viewed with contempt the more aggressive breed of Republican that came on the scene with Reagan. The question that Kissinger's account raises is whether he was more than a transitional figure as a Secretary of State to the Carter and Reagan administrations. Despite the razzle-dazzle of

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his shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East and arms-control agreements with the Soviet Union, his tenure seems to have left few real accomplishments.

Indeed, as the title *Years of Renewal* suggests, this is no chronicle of triumphs because there wasn't all that much triumph. Rather, it is a settling of accounts. Kissinger's saturnine view of the world, and America's role in it, did not sit well with the former liberals turned neoconservatives such as Norman Podhoretz, nor with human rights activists on the Left. Now Kissinger responds. His enemies, real and imagined, come in for a drubbing. His main ideological opponent doesn't appear to be communism; instead, it is what he refers to as Wilsonianism—the notion that the United States should intervene abroad on behalf of democracy and human rights rather than vigilantly pursue what Kissinger would define as the national interest pure and simple.

The red thread running through Kissinger's account is the battle over détente. From the outset, Kissinger makes it clear that he and Nixon saw the United States as moving from "domination to leadership." The American nuclear monopoly, Kissinger says, was dwindling. Europe was regaining its vitality, Asia was on the rise, and Africa was being swept by independence movements. Kissinger says that his ambition was to create not dominance based on power, but leadership resting on consensus. "But an attempt to balance rewards and penalties inseparable from consensus-building," writes Kissinger, "ran counter to the prevailing Wilsonianism, which tried to bring about a global moral order through the direct application of America's political values undiluted by compromises with 'realism.'"

What Kissinger objected to were two camps: liberals and the ex-liberal, budding neoconservatives who attempted to push for a pro-human rights policy inside the Soviet Union. *The New York Times* began arguing for linking agreements with the Soviet Union to changes in its internal behavior. At the same time, the neoconservatives started pushing for a more moralistic foreign policy as a means of regenerating American morale. In particular, Kissinger tangled with Sen. Henry M. Jackson over the Jackson-Vanik amendment which set firm numbers for the yearly emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union. The amendment tied those numbers to Most-Favored-Nation status for the Soviet Union. Kissinger was outraged. According to Kissinger, "Nixon and I agreed with the neoconservative premise, but we also believed that the simple Wilsonianism of the early '60s had lured us into adventures beyond our capacities and deprived us of criteria to define the essential elements of our national purpose."

Kissinger, however, glides over important developments in American foreign policy that made the '70s and '80s a far cry from the "simple Wilsonianism" he identifies as responsible for Vietnam. The truth is that the conduct of American foreign policy was becoming more, not less, complicated. For one thing, there was the emergence of Jewish concerns in American foreign policy. The fate of Israel, which looked as though it might go under in 1972, prompted new activism, leading to the rise of the neoconservative movement. But the neoconservatives that Kissinger decries had not shifted to the far right at that point; it was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, after all, who attacked the Reagan administration for excess zeal during Iran-Contra. The neoconservatives had a point in attacking the human rights-less stance of Kissinger and Nixon; given the ideals of American democracy, their indifference to the plight of Soviet Jews or other oppressed peoples was, over the long term, unsustainable. In the '70s, the neoconservatives did represent continuity with the Cold War liberal tradition of Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Walter Reuther that seemed about to go under during the Vietnam War.

In the '80s, Reagan, more flexible than his advisers, essentially picked up this tradition in building up militarily and emphasizing human rights. Kissinger quite rightly complains about the gross exaggerations of American inferiority spread by Reagan and his acolytes; for all the denunciations of SALT II, Reagan was careful to observe its limits. But how much attention did Reagan himself pay to throw-weights and circular error probability of missiles? Probably as little attention as he paid to Education Secretary Samuel "Hello, Mr. Mayor" Pierce. Fortunate enough to have Mikhail Gorbachev as his counterpart, Reagan was able to wind down the Cold War—to the chagrin of many of his followers. (Norman Podhoretz was first off the mark: In 1983, he accused the Reagan administration of "appeasement by any other name.") Soon enough conservative activist Howard Phillips was denouncing Reagan as a "useful idiot." Kissinger is plainly bewildered by these developments: He cannot abide the notion that the homiletic Reagan could dispense with foreign policy theories and come out on top.

Kissinger's approach had been quite different. He had attempted to lend the Brezhnev regime legitimacy in negotiating with it as an equal power. Wracked by fears of illegitimacy, Brezhnev eagerly accepted. Stability, order, and calm were Kissinger's

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watchwords. Allowing the Soviet Union to crumble would have flouted realist orthodoxy about the need for order; what would all those restive nationalities do with freedom? Chaos was sure to follow. So Kissinger and Nixon wanted to prop up the doddering Brezhnev. Reagan was different. Outlandish as it may have seemed, he wanted to see the Soviet Union go under. At least he said he did, and it did. Kissinger, it may be recalled, offered the Bush administration his services as a negotiator to cobble out a deal with the Soviet Union for a condominium over Eastern Europe even as the empire was collapsing. Now, rewriting Cold War history, Kissinger claims, "Reagan's policy was, in fact, a canny reassertion of the geopolitical strategies of the Nixon and Ford administration clothed in the rhetoric of Wilsonianism." So adept was this cloaking manuever that it seems to have escaped everyone except Kissinger.

If Kissinger's Soviet policy has disappeared along with the empire, his lasting legacy has been in China. A cruder version of the '70s debate over détente has emerged, with today's generation of neoconservatives at *The Weekly Standard* bristling for a new Cold War, while the Clinton administration pursues its version of Kissingerian détente with Beijing. The origins of this impasse can be traced to the manner in which Nixon and Kissinger handled engagement with China. The problem is that it came almost entirely on Chinese terms, and it treated America's allies Taiwan and Japan shabbily. Once again, as a realist, Kissinger thought he could dispense with Taiwan and Japan, but they have proven to be more powerful than he could have expected. Basing foreign policy on apparent expedience rather than on democratic values, you might say, can end up being most inexpedient.

Kissinger and Nixon put much faith in Mao. Kissinger refers to him as "intellectually still vigorous" when he met with him in February 1973. But how intellectually vigorous was someone who, Kissinger reports, stated that "If the Soviet Union would throw its bombs and kill all those over 30 who are Chinese, that would solve the problem for us." Judging from the books and memoirs that have emerged from China in recent years, he was a sex-addicted, disease-ridden despot whose grasp on reality was tenuous at best. Missing from Kissinger's account is any sense of the enormity of Mao's crimes, of meeting someone who was prepared to sacrifice tens of millions in one fantastic industrial and agricultural scheme after another. All Kissinger can do is recount Mao's addled lucubrations about swallows flapping their wings in the great foreign policy storms to come. This is not exactly Churchill telling Stalin, in an allusion to freedom in Eastern Europe, that the eagle should let the small birds fly free.

Not surprisingly, Kissinger rushed to defend the Chinese regime after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Any government, he said, would have swept away such protestors from its square. Kissinger sees eye-to-eye with the Chinese. "I have generally questioned the wisdom of seeking by explicit pressures to compel societies with vastly different backgrounds to adopt, in a matter of years and at early stages of their political evolution, the same standards and procedures it took centuries to grow in the West," concludes Kissinger. Well, yes. But is urging the Chinese government not to imprison dissidents tantamount to asking it to turn into a democracy overnight? Recent events suggest that the Clinton administration's silence on human rights, coupled with free trade, has only led to a worsening of conditions inside the country. In following the Kissingerian formula, the United States has sold out human rights without getting anything in return.

Kissinger will have none of this. He concludes on a sentimental note. Dismissing the oft-cited notion that his childhood left him with a yearning for order—"the Germany of my youth had a great deal of order but very little justice"—Kissinger contends that his parents left a greater mark on him. But perhaps the true answer is that the thing he was most realistic about was orchestrating his own ascent. Realism can often be another term for opportunism. It fit right in with Kissinger's ambitions for himself. Turning himself into a small power at Harvard, he carefully climbed the greasy pole to become America's most celebrated foreign policy figure. But his celebrity has exceeded his insight; his vanity his perspicuity. The further his tenure recedes into the distance, the smaller his accomplishments will appear. Kissinger confused his own decline with America's.

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Spy for a New Millenium

John le Carré takes on the global financial mobsters

By David Ignatius

GEORGE SMILEY IS BACK! THAT'S THE treasure hidden in John le Carré's newest novel. He isn't called George Smiley anymore—the author famously buried him after *The Secret Pilgrim*, supposedly because Smiley, the quintessential creature of the Cold War, had to die with the fall of the Berlin Wall. (Le Carré offered a simpler, and much funnier, explanation in a recent lecture—namely that Alec Guinness kidnapped Smiley, by playing him so brilliantly in the BBC television productions that le Carré could no longer hear his favorite character's voice, only Guinness', and had to abandon him.)

SINGLE & SINGLE
By John le Carré
Scribner, $26

But whatever voice he's speaking, Smiley is back. His name in this book is Nat Brock, which has a crisper, TV-anchorman ring to it than Smiley, but that's part of the message—le Carré chooses his characters' names as mischievously as Dickens. And there are other obvious differences. The new Smiley doesn't read classical German, he isn't pudgy, he doesn't have a house in Bywater Street, he doesn't have a faithless wife, he isn't a member of the Oxbridge upper-middle-class. Indeed, he lacks nearly all the superficial attributes of George Smiley. He isn't even a real spy—he's a customs agent!

Still, Nat Brock has the inner qualities that defined George Smiley—and perfected the literary genre of the spy novel. He is a gray man, with a world-weariness so profound that the reader senses immediately that Brock has gazed into the very bottom of the abyss. You have the feeling with Brock, just as with Smiley, that he knows how the story will end before it begins.

And, like Smiley, Brock has the deferential personal habits that mask an awesome competence in his trade. He is the perfect British operative—his politeness and bonhomie masking an obsessive quest for the truth. I've been convinced for many years that the central fact about the English is that they are the best liars in the world. They are raised from birth to dissemble, artfully and with self-deprecating wit. Where an American considers himself discreet if he keeps a secret for a week, the Brits take their secrets to the grave. And Brock is such a man.

Brock's enemy is a piratical gang of Russian crooks and the sleek, Turnbull-and-Asser-clad British banker, Tiger Single, who is laundering their money. Le Carré describes his villains with a reportorial precision, and the book is a veritable cookbook for money laundering—explaining how to use Swiss banks, Andorran offshore accounts, Viennese charitable foundations, and Turkish holiday villas to stash your stolen billions. It would be nice if these were purely imaginary characters, but they are emblematic of the New World Disorder—the fixers and Mafiosi who lurk in the shadows today in Russia, certainly, but also in France, China, Japan, Italy—even in merrie olde England.

Le Carré knows that choosing the right villain is the hardest part of writing a thriller these days. It used to be easy; the only question was which ruthless Communist stereotype to choose. Nobody ever found a better model than le Carré's Karla—as opaque and menacing as the system he represented. After the Cold War ended, le Carré suffered from a villain deficit, and he meandered a bit looking for the right target. To his credit, he never stooped to the Nazis, the very bottom of the thriller-writer's barrel.

But in this novel, le Carré has found precisely the right villain. The new financial mobsters really are the successors to the KGB as global enemy No. 1. They symbolize a world in which private power—the mafias, money launderers, currency speculators, and their attendant musclemen—have become more powerful and pervasive than any intelligence agency. The people who have to fight them are humble customs agents like Brock, and tax investigators, cops, and a few superannuated spies.

DAVID IGNATIUS *is a columnist for* The Washington Post *op-ed page. His new novel,* The Sun King, *will be published in October by Random House.*

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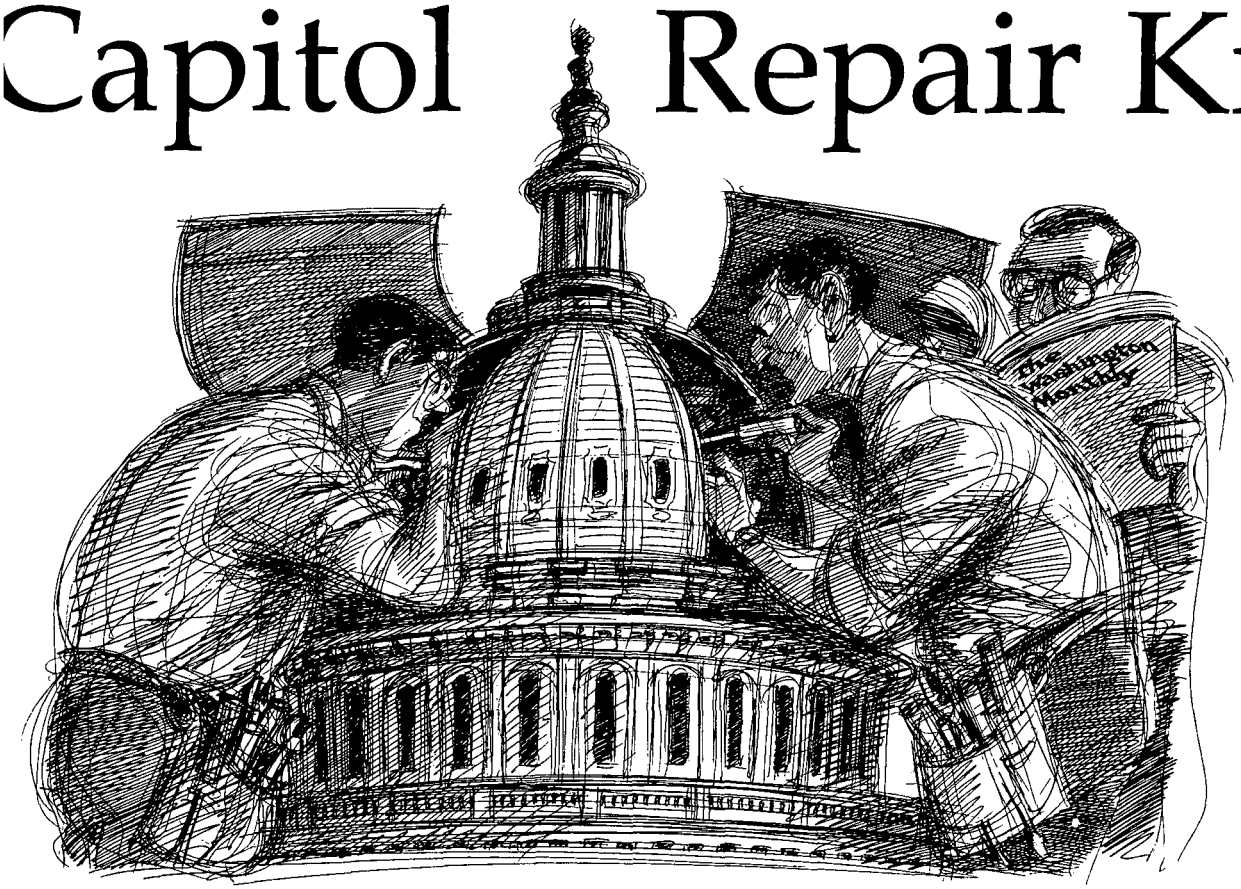

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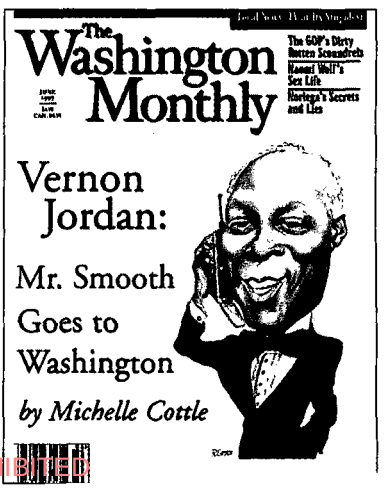

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In all of these ways, *Single & Single* marks the end of the post-Cold War drift in le Carré's writing. He went through a string of books which even his most loyal fans found difficult to read. Some were intensely introspective, like *A Perfect Spy*, others were more whimsical, like *The Tailor of Panama*. This is the first le Carré novel in a while that fuses plot and character in a way reminiscent of his classics, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* and *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.

Le Carré's world remains one of moral ambiguity, colored in the inevitable shades of gray. But a clear and menacing enemy has come into sight again, and a sturdy hero has been found to do battle—and win! This isn't a book that ends with an exhausted affirmation of victory—like the bitterly ironic "Yes, well, I suppose I did" that closed *Smiley's People*. This one ends as happily and sentimentally as any le Carré novel I can remember. With helicopters and blazing guns, it's an ending even Jerry Bruckheimer would like!

There are modest problems with this novel, and they stem from the fact that le Carré is a gifted writer who doesn't simply want to write "thrillers." He wants to write true "novels," which examine the interior lives of his characters and reckon with the central issues that have shaped the novelist's own life. It's a version of the Woody Allen problem—for years, his fans kept saying: Stop trying to be Ingmar Bergman and go back to making funny films like "Bananas" and "Take the Money and Run." But Woody Allen didn't want to make funny films anymore. He wanted to grow as an artist. So too with John le Carré.

Most particularly, le Carré wants to explore the tension between himself and his father, a charming con-man named Ronnie. *A Perfect Spy* told the story of a monstrously seductive father and a son's struggle to assert himself. *Single & Single* tells a similar story about a corrupt father who runs a sort of Lazard Freres of money laundering and his son Oliver, who struggles to establish his independence—first through betrayal, then through loyalty. It's a compelling thriller, but far less convincing as a novel of the inner life. The difficulty is that le Carré's attempts to fathom the interior lives of Single pére et fils occasionally subvert the narrative force of the neo-spy novel he has plotted. A good "thriller" is like an arrow shot through the air. The pleasure of reading is akin to hurtling toward a target, carried by the momentum of the plot and the taut description of character and scene. Reading a "novel" is a different experience: slower, more reflective, more discursive—more like a stroll through a dense forest than an arrow's flight.

For all of le Carré's meandering discussion of the inner lives of *Single & Single*, I must say that I didn't find either character entirely believable. Much like the father and son in *A Perfect Spy*, they're picaresque—outsized, disproportionate, all sizzle and no steak. The motivations of Single Jr., in particular, are a mystery. You don't really fathom what led him to betray his Dad, any more than you understand why he risks everything to save him at the end (other than the natural human desire to help a Dad who has been beaten to a bloody pulp). The secret of le Carré's relationship with his own father remains intact, for better or worse, to explore in another book.

The plot of this book is so well-constructed that you have a sense of epiphany at the end, but no real sense of what the characters have learned about themselves through all the turbulent action. In that sense, the book has an awkward status—not quite a "novel," not quite a "thriller." People always say that's what they like about le Carré, but I find it an awkward mix. A book that's all one thing—like *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*—may be better literature. I write this with some small appreciation for the dilemma le Carré faces. I've written four spy novels myself which, though hardly in a league with le Carré's work, have found a limited readership. Yet I've sometimes balked at simply writing "thrillers"—what intellectually insecure former *Washington Monthly* editor would truly aspire to be Robert Ludlum? As a result, I've sometimes clogged my books with inessential detail or "writerly" writing that subverted the arrow's flight of the plot.

When I began working on my fifth book last year, I decided to try a "novel," with no spies, no hokey plot, no slick foreign locations cobbled together from trips to Yerevan or Tashkent or Beijing. It's called *The Sun King*, and it's a dark Washington love story about baby boomers whose reach exceeds their grasp. We'll see what critics say—probably it will be some version of: Why doesn't he make funny movies like "Bananas" anymore? But it's good to experiment—good to wander in the wilderness, as le Carré has in his recent books—looking for new stories and new ways to tell them.

Yet it's also good to go back home. The real art in *Single & Single*, for me, is not the writerly palaver about fathers and sons, but the taut, sparely written character of Nat Brock. Le Carré has found that voice again. He has located the new enemy and described him with precision. He has found a wise but wary champion—a customs agent, an economic warrior—to be a hero for our time. The post-Cold War is over. Something new and frightening is upon us. And thank heaven, George Smiley is back.

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Memo *of the* Month

For details on how to get forms and publications, see page 6 of the instructions for Form 1040 or 1040A.

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Tax Law Changes Effective for 1999

Use your 1998 tax return as a guide in figuring your 1999 estimated tax, but be sure to consider the changes noted in this section. For more information on changes that may affect your 1999 estimated tax, see Pub. 505.

Modification of estimated tax safe harbor for some taxpayers. For 1999, the estimated tax safe harbor that is based on the tax shown on your 1998 tax return is 105% of that amount if you are not a farmer or a fisherman and the adjusted gross income shown on that return is more than $150,000 or, if married filing separately for 1999, more than $75,000.

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Political Booknotes

Prudent Justice

by Abner Mikva

THE BEST JOB I EVER HAD, IN several trips to the public arena, was as a law clerk to a Supreme Court justice back in the 1950s. That Court doesn't even have a name (like the Warren Court or the Burger Court). Fred Vinson was the chief justice, but he was not there long enough nor deeply enough to get a Court named after him. With the exception of the Steel Seizure case (*Youngstown Sheet & Tube v. United States*), there weren't too many seminal cases that came out of my clerkship year, or of the years when Vinson and some other Truman appointees prevailed. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the strong voices of Justices Hugo Black, William O. Douglas, and Felix Frankfurter, there isn't much judicial prose that would have survived the "Vinson" Court.

ONE CASE AT A TIME
by Cass Sunstein
Harvard University Press, $29.95

To Cass Sunstein, that's not necessarily bad. Sunstein, a professor of law at the University of Chicago, is a proponent of "minimalism," which he defines as "saying no more than is necessary to justify an outcome, and leaving as much as possible undecided." Under that definition, judges do well to avoid seminal pronouncements and timeless prose: Say what you have to say to decide the case before you go on to the next dispute.

Part of what makes the book remarkable is that such an approach is *not* what academicians usually favor. How can you write a book about nonseminal cases? How can you excerpt an opinion that has no classy language? While Sunstein might hold up his minimalist model as one that best carries forward the judiciary's proper role in a free society, not too many judges follow that role. That's fortunate for Sunstein's profession: Law reviews and law books alike find the expansiveness of judges' writings great grist for their mills. And if that expansiveness includes some purple prose and some *ad hominem* comments about a fellow jurist, so much the better.

How does minimalism play out in the current Supreme Court? The Sunstein analysis makes Justice Sandra Day O'Connor the very model of what a Supreme Court justice should be. Because she is usually looking for the quietest way to resolve the case, her opinions are "minimalist." Since she avoids extremes, doctrinal or semantic, her language is calm and not likely to be deathless. Justice Antonin Scalia, on the other hand, is the activist-protagonist under the minimalist analysis. While Justice Scalia always preaches judicial restraint, his opinions range far and wide over the legal countryside. When he has a majority, he will take the Court as far as it is willing to go, restrained only by how much he worries about losing the majority if he gets too epexegetic.

Sunstein starts his analysis of the current Supreme Court with cases like the right-to-die case, the decision striking down "male only" admissions to the Virginia Military Institute, and *Romer v. Evans*, which struck down a Colorado law discriminating against homosexuals. They were minimalist decisions, because although they dealt with the most hot-button issues in our society, the Court made as few waves as possible.

Sunstein's analysis seems to honor those justices who do the least to rock the boat. Justices who let the Congress (and the state legislatures) do their thing without interference from the courts are to be preferred to those who try to micromanage the legislative process—such as the Vandevanters and Butlers who fought the New Deal from their perches on the Supreme Court. His analysis gets a little tenuous when he applies minimalism to the First Amendment cases. He acknowledges that the history of First Amendment cases before the Court has not been minimalist in nature. But he urges that technological uncertainties should move the Court to be chary in saying too much too broadly. I'm not sure that his own history of First Amendment advocacy allows for some fundamental distinction between free speech problems when they come up in cable as opposed to when they come up in books or movies.

That, of course, was the appeal of Justice Hugo Black's absolutist views about the First Amendment: He didn't have to distinguish between the forms of speech. On speech issues, he often clashed with that classic minimalist Felix Frankfurter. Ironically, Sunstein's own First Amendment views seem closer to Black's than Frankfurter's. Which only goes to show that nobody has ever really been able to reconcile all of the twists and turns of the Court when it deals with speech cases anyway, so Sunstein's problems are not unusual. Some years ago, Professor Lee Bollinger, then at the University of Michigan, explained the inconsistencies of First Amendment cases by calling the Amendment "aspirational" rather than a binding legal doctrine. That meant that when the country was secure we could tolerate otherwise objectionable speech and speech acts more easily than when we were at war or under threat. While some called the approach a cop-out, it had the advantage of not trying to reconcile the irreconcilable.

The use of a new characterization for Supreme Court doctrine is always a dicey proposition. We still are chewing over the old terms—originalism, interpretivisim, legal realism—so that the addition of a new way to line up the cases is a mixed blessing. But since Sunstein acknowledges that it doesn't always work and should not become a catechism, his approach can help explain why courts in general and the Supreme Court in particular, seem to meander. And we can analyze those

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meanderings by using the word minimalism to mean, a la Lewis Carroll, exactly what the user says it means.

ABNER MIKVA *is a visiting professor at the University of Illinois College of Law and former chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit*

Bad Apple

by Steve Lohr

STEVEN P. JOBS HAS PROVED AN elusive subject for the parade of authors who over the years have tried to fathom the corporate soap opera known as Apple Computer. A business visionary and brilliant technologist with his finger on the pulse of popular culture, or a scheming hustler who became rich and famous by happenstance? Books on Apple invariably toss in a mixture of his Jekyll-and-Hyde traits and then take a stand: hero or villain.

INFINITE LOOP
How Apple, the World's Most Insanely Great Computer Company, Went Insane
by Michael S. Malone
Doubleday, $27.50

Michael S. Malone's *Infinite Loop* comes down, with all the subtlety of a jackhammer, in the latter camp. The villainous Jobs, according to Malone, is the central explanation for Apple's fall from grace, despite possessing superior technology for years. But Malone's explanation for Apple's travails has a few flaws. Not the least is that Jobs was not even at Apple during the company's long stretch of lost opportunities and decline from 1985 until 1997. Since his return, Jobs has led a remarkable turnaround for a company thought to have been on the verge of extinction.

Malone begins with a tantalizing opening line: "Before and after everything, companies are about character." But he never really develops the theme except to try to illuminate Jobs' lack of character by piling on anecdotes and descriptions that are often so mean-spirited they undermine the author's credibility, not Jobs'. Before he finishes page two, Malone has summed up the Apple co-founder as a "protean inconstant figure who seemed composed of nothing but charm and a pure will to power."

To give the book its due, *Infinite Loop* is a lively and detailed chronicle of Apple's origins, rise, descent and recent signs of renewal. Malone grew up in Silicon Valley, went to elementary school with Jobs, worked on one of Apple's annual reports and, as an aspiring entrepreneur, pitched a product to Apple (and was turned down). Today, Malone is the editor of *Forbes ASAP*, a technology supplement to the business magazine. He certainly knows the personal computer industry, and his book displays a confident grasp of his subject. And Malone writes well, when he's not trying too hard.

At 597 pages, *Infinite Loop* was clearly intended as the definitive Big Book on Apple. But to achieve that status, Malone's book ought to deliver a wealth of new material or new insights—and it comes up short on both counts. There is scant evidence of fresh legwork by Malone. The book is mainly a rewrite job. Even when he offers a new interpretation of events, his material is mostly borrowed. For example, he argues that the legend of Jobs' visit to Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center—where he saw the ideas (a "mouse" and point-and-click graphic icons) that would shape the future of computing and Apple's landmark product, the Macintosh—is a myth. Malone points out that the Macintosh project was proposed three months before Jobs visited Xerox PARC, apparently in late 1979. The real force behind the Macintosh, Malone asserts, was Jeff Raskin, an Apple engineer Jobs forced out.

That Raskin started as the team leader for the Macintosh project and was elbowed aside by Jobs is well-known within the industry—and has been duly documented in previous Apple books. Malone goes further saying that the concept, the design, and even the words Jobs later used to describe the Macintosh were simply lifted from Raskin. But Malone's main source for this seems to be Raskin's memoirs published in 1996. The essential claims of Raskin's version,

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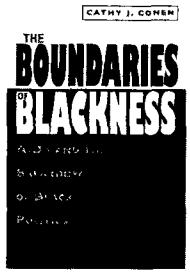

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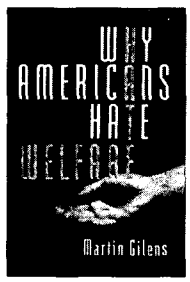

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Malone decides, "had the ring of truth."

OK, but did Malone hunt down the former PARC researchers or former Apple employees who might be able to shed light on the subject? Again, no evidence of it. Besides, the Macintosh that came to market after Jobs took over was a very different product than the one he inherited from Raskin. So Malone's interpretation comes off as much as a reflection of his anti-Jobs bias as an insight.

The author's picture of Jobs as an empty vessel is often contradicted in his own book. Malone portrays Jobs as a person without any real gift for technology. But repeatedly, Jobs displays his technical acumen, showing that he is far more than a sleazy salesman who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Even when he was working for Atari, before Apple, Jobs once flew off to the company's German subsidiary to solve a critical engineering flaw in the computer game machines it was producing. To Malone, this is an example of Jobs' cunning. "Though he had no apparent natural aptitude for electronics," Malone writes, "his mind was so quick that he could learn what he needed to know faster than anyone around him."

The real story in *Infinite Loop* has little to do with character and just about everything to do with strategy. If there is a lasting lesson from high-technology businesses, it is that if you make the big decisions right the payoff is so great it takes care of everything else—egomaniacs, wasteful management, and on and on.

The mistake Apple made again and again was its inability to see the wisdom of unbundling software and hardware. Apple had several opportunities to unleash its superior Macintosh software. For a decade, the Macintosh operating system was clearly superior to Microsoft's Windows, until 1995 with the introduction of Windows 95. As Peter Schwartz of the Global Business Network once told me, "If Apple had licensed its software years ago, the Justice Department would be suing Apple today, not Microsoft."

STEVE LOHR *is the technology reporter for* The New York Times.

Containing Consumerism

by Robert de Neufville

IF ROBERT FRANK HAD HIS WAY, we would have spent a lot less over the last holiday season. According to Frank, we are in the grip of "luxury fever," a kind of mania for fancy things we don't need. Echoing Juliet Schor's recent book *The Overspent American*, Frank argues that we are driven by a need to keep up with our neighbors, sacrificing time better spent with friends and family to work long hours, just so we can buy an impressive car or house which does little to make us happier. The sad consequence is that our unprecedented wealth has not brought us unprecedented happiness.

Although it has a puritanical edge, *Luxury Fever* is not a moralizing book. In fact, Frank's use of the word "luxury" suggests an indulgence he doesn't intend. The real subject of his book is not luxury, but rather what Thorstein Veblen famously called "conspicuous consumption"—anything we buy primarily because of the status owning it confers. By "luxury," then, Frank means not only Patek Philippe watches and $5,000 gas grills, but also less extravagant items like wide-screen TVs, Nike sneakers, and gourmet coffee beans. What matters is not how much something costs, but whether we are more interested in the thing itself or in what owning it says about us.

LUXURY FEVER
Why Money Fails to Satisfy in an Era of Success
By Robert Frank
The Free Press, $25.00

Conspicuous consumption seems superficial, but may not be something we can so easily do without. As Frank points out, our concern with status is not necessarily selfish or shallow, but often sensible: What we own helps determine what social worlds we can enter, what jobs we can get, who we can marry, and so on. An expensive suit, for example, is hardly frivolous if it makes the wearer look more professional or competent in a job interview. Indeed, this is precisely the problem. While certain kinds of ostentation make sense from the individual's perspective, they may be tremendously wasteful from the perspective of society as a whole. The reason is that conspicuous consumption is not productive, but competitive. No matter how hard we compete, the same number of people come out on top.

The real problem with conspicuous consumption is not that it is selfish, but that it is ultimately unsatisfying. Because the Joneses are trying to keep up with us as much as we are with them, it is fruitless to expect any lasting satisfaction from gold watches and expensive gas grills. Nevertheless, Frank estimates—although it is hard to imagine how he arrives at this remarkable number—that Americans squander trillions of dollars in the attempt. This money would be better spent on what he calls "inconspicuous consumption," that is, on things we enjoy in themselves. If we gave up our expensive cars or large houses, for example, we wouldn't have to work as hard and would have more time to spend with our families. We could also use a greater share of the money we do earn to address pressing social issues, either by giving to charity or by accepting a higher level of public spending. As a society, in other words, we could do more to keep our air and drinking water clean, educate our children, employ the poor, maintain our roads, treat and prevent drug addiction, save for the future, and so on. Indeed, if Frank is to be believed, we already have the resources to solve almost all of our major social problems. We have only to spend more wisely than we do.

This argument seems to cut against the received wisdom of neoclassical economics that if everyone simply pursues his or her own interest, the resulting competition for profits will bring about the greatest material satisfaction for all "as if by an

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invisible hand." Of course, even Adam Smith recognized (to a greater extent, in fact, than some of his disciples) that the invisible hand of the free market is far from perfect. Among other things, Smith saw that individuals acting on their own would be unlikely to carry out large public tasks. Frank suggests that minimizing conspicuous consumption is a public good like maintaining an army. Since conspicuous consumption is competitive—the more one person spends, the more others have to spend to keep up—my choice to buy or not to buy something is not merely a private decision but also a public act. If personal spending is thus a public issue, it may make sense to regulate it.

Frank's point is worth considering carefully. The current boom in luxury spending comes even though our national savings rate—always among the lowest of the industrialized countries—recently dropped below zero. In other words, by some measures, we have been spending more than we earn. Not surprisingly, personal bankruptcies are on the rise. Moreover, since 1973 the average incomes of the worst paid 40 percent of the population have steadily declined (although this trend has showed some sign of reversing in recent years) even as the incomes of top earners have risen dramatically. It is easy to see something obscene in the way we choose to spend our money.

According to Frank, one way to straighten out Americans' priorities would be to tax conspicuous consumption. Of course, governments have tried without much success to restrict luxury spending through the use of sumptuary laws and luxury taxes (many of which were more aimed at reinforcing class distinctions than at reducing social waste) at least since the days of the Roman republic. These laws have generally failed because they take on the impossible task of identifying what counts as a luxury and what doesn't and thereby encourage people to find or invent luxuries that fall outside the law. Frank thinks we can get around this problem by levying a tax on all consumption, rather than just on luxury spending. Instead of paying the tax at the register like an ordinary sales tax, we would file an annual consumption tax return as we now do an income tax return. In order to ensure the tax would mainly affect luxury items and not fall heavily on the poor (who have to spend a larger proportion of their incomes on necessities), the tax would be steeply progressive.

Luxury Fever is on the whole a fine, thought-provoking book. Frank draws on an impressive range of fields to make his argument, and writes with an enviable clarity. The progressive consumption tax he proposes may be an excellent idea, and certainly has advantages over the income and sales taxes it is presumably meant to replace. We should be skeptical, however, that such a tax could be a panacea for all our social ills. The high value-added tax already used in much of Europe hasn't had the kind of effect on spending patterns that Frank would like. A progressive tax might be more effective, but it would also almost certainly slow the economy by reducing our incentive to earn money. Of course, if the tax really reduced the amount of money we waste, this would be a small price to pay.

A deeper problem is that a tax may not be an appropriate or effective way to address what is essentially a cultural issue. To begin with, the idea that everything we do that affects others—in other words, almost everything we do—is potentially subject to regulation is a dangerous one. Frank is right to suggest that we already use similar grounds to justify other kinds of public action, but wrong if he believes there should be no further limits on the public sphere. If individual rights are to have any meaning, there has to be a class of private decisions over which the majority has no say. Although conspicuous consumption may nevertheless be a public issue, it is by no means clear that a tax could really get at the most fundamental problem. One way or another, people are going to continue to try to impress one another. Even if much of this concern for status is unproductive from the perspective of society as a whole, it is hard to believe that we could ever tax away our competitive instincts.

Perhaps the real problem is not that we are competitive but rather that we live at a time when what we earn is seen as the measure of our contribution to society, and the question "How much are you worth?" is understood to be about how much money you have. Acquisitiveness itself, which the ancient Greeks saw as a terrible failing, has become the paramount virtue of *homo economicus*—even though acquisition is certainly not the highest achievement to which a human being can aspire. If this is the fever that afflicts us, it is not something an instrument of social policy as blunt as a tax is by itself likely to change. By at least raising the issue, however, books like *Luxury Fever* may start to set the change in motion.

ROBERT DE NEUFVILLE *is a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley.*

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Tidbits & Outrages

Now the Children Glow with Promise

A Chicago teacher has been accused of punishing disruptive students with prolonged electric shocks, using a spark-plug and a current-producing crank.

Death-Styles of the Rich and Famous

The Green River Cemetery in East Hampton, Long Island, is now so popular as a gravesite among the rich and famous that all future gravesites have been booked in advance.

Spoken Like a Veteran

[illegible] Cameron, a Christian [illegible] psychologist, told Rolling Stone magazine that [illegible] gay sex would supplant heterosexual sex because [illegible] sex is boring, and generally it doesn't deliver the [illegible] sexual pleasure that homosexual sex [illegible] The evidence is that men do a better [illegible] job on men than women.

He Thought the Sign Said Yanni...

[illegible] against the rock band Aerosmith, claiming he [illegible] after attending one of their concerts.

Those Walkers Can Do a Lot of Damage

An insurance company filed suit against the family of an 81-year-old woman who was killed by a truck. The company sought $2,800 for damages they claim the woman's body did to the truck.

And It Offends the Natives

New York subway conductors have been encouraged to stop saying "please," as in "please stand clear of the doors," because it takes too much time.

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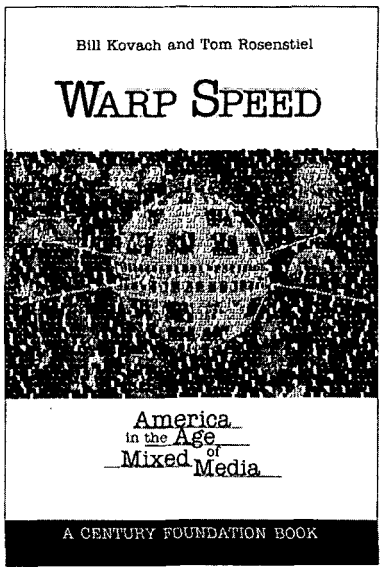

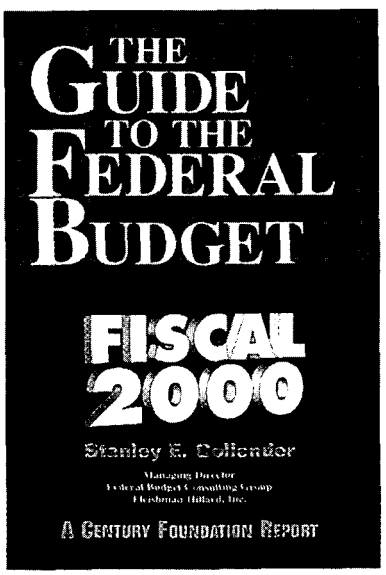

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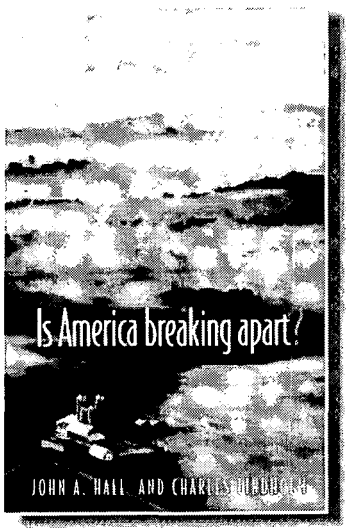

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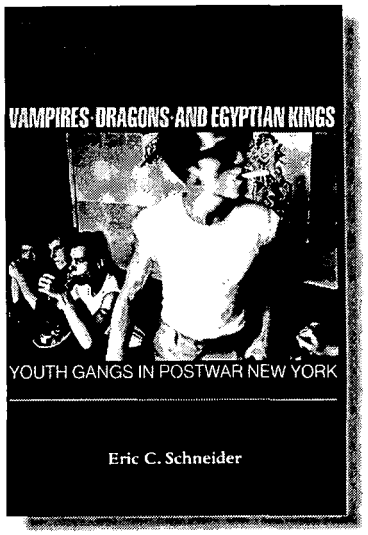

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